Interview with Harry E.T. Thayer

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR HARRY E.T. THAYER

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Harry, I wonder if you'd give me a little about your background. Where did you come from?

THAYER: Well, I was born in Boston, but that was an aberration of my father's short transfer from Philadelphia. Basically I'm a Philadelphian. My father was an investment banker. I was raised in Philadelphia, went to the Haverford School for all my primary and secondary education and then went into the Navy for a couple of years, entering just before the war was over as a seventeen-year-old, in the end just served in the States, got out in '46, and went to Yale. I graduated from Yale in 1951; an automobile accident had interrupted my education.

I had planned to work as a newspaper man and was hoping to go to work for the Hartford Courant in Connecticut, but at the last minute was offered a job with Alaska Airlines as assistant to the chairman of the board in New York. So I went to New York for Alaska Airlines, stayed there for six months and decided to go on with my original plan. I got a job at Newsweek as a copy boy, stayed there for a couple of years. And that was during the [Senator Joseph] McCarthy period. During this time my interest in Chinese, which had started at my senior year at Yale intensified. Even though I hadn't majored in it or

taken any Chinese courses at Yale, I began at Yale to read into China. At Newsweek I continued my interest in things Chinese, although I worked there on other subjects, especially medicine and science writing.

This interest increased during the two years at Newsweek, which was '52 to '54. Then I went to Europe with my wife for three months, used up our savings, just wandered around Europe. After we came back, I went to work for the Philadelphia Bulletin at the same time as taking the Foreign Service exams, worked for the Philadelphia Bulletin as a police reporter for a year and then as a rewrite man in general assignment for a year, which ended in 1956. Then I went into the Foreign Service September of 1956.

Q: What attracted you towards the Foreign Service?

THAYER: I first got attracted to the Foreign Service by interest in things Chinese, in what was happening between the U.S. and China. And this was during the time of the issuance of the White Paper in 1949. When I was at college, my interest was boosted also by a major article in the Reporter magazine about the China lobby, by the rise of Senator Jenner and others...

Q: Knowland.

THAYER: Knowland, the senator from Formosa, McCarthy, the whole shebang. And I just became more and more aware of things relating to U.S.-China relations. And, at the same time, I was stimulated further by our trip to Europe, where, among other things, I stopped in at embassies and talked to Foreign Service officers as I could. And I agonized about trying to go to the Foreign Service as soon as that trip was over, but decided to put a little more newspaper work under my belt, take the exam to keep my options open; so I took the exam but went to newspapering.

When I came into the Foreign Service, I came in with also a lot of the romance of the Foreign Service. I liked the idea of traveling abroad. As a kid, I traveled a lot around the

United States, taking all kinds of different jobs in a variety of states. And I had a lot of the romantic attraction of the Foreign Service, in addition to this rather unfocused but nevertheless strong interest in getting involved somehow in China.

There was another factor in this interest. In 1951, while I was working for the Philadelphia Bulletin—let me back up a minute. During all this period, the Korean War was very much a part our lives. And I expected to be called back in the Navy for the Korean War. I had been an enlisted man 1945-'46. So when I went to join a reserve unit, I took the examination for a commissioned officer. The Korean War and things Asian had also come very much in our consciousness. I thought I was going to be called back in with my unit. In the end, for some reason, the unit wasn't called, and I went on with my civilian life.

While I was at the Bulletin, which was during the '54 to '56 period—I guess that must have been '55—the Chinese announced that they had a number of prisoners of war, including a friend and guy with whom I graduated, Jack Downey— John Downey—one of the CIA men who was captured after he was shot down on a mission into Manchuria. Not shot down, but he had landed in a small plane, and he was captured along with a fellow named Fecteau. In any event, the announcement by the Chinese of John Downey's capture had a terrifically strong impact on me, and it intensified my desire to get involved somehow.

I remember picking up the phone in Philadelphia the morning I read this in the New York Times and calling Peter Braestrup. Peter more recently was editor of the Wilson Quarterly and now is with the Library of Congress in another capacity. But Peter was then with Time magazine and a journalistic friend. And I remember saying to Peter, “Peter, isn't there something we can do about Jack? Can't we do something about Jack?” And internally I thought to myself, one of the things that I can do is to get involved, not as an act of charity, but just as an act of—I just felt I wanted to do something. I felt I wanted to be a part of that rather than observing. It increased those desires of wanting a piece of the action rather than observing the action. So Jack's capture intensified my desire, or the announcement of his capture intensified my desire to enter the Foreign Service.

Actually, Jack's capture came back into my life after I entered the Foreign Service. I still had more to do with Jack in a very direct way after going in. We can come to that at a later stage.

Q: In the first place, when you entered the Foreign Service, was there any attempt to channel you off towards the USIA side with your newspaper experience or not?

THAYER: No, there wasn't any attempt, as far as I remember. I remember being asked by one of my Washington- resident Yale classmates why didn't I go into USIA. And I remember answering him—this was at a party—"If I'm going to go into the State Department or the government, I want to be a part of the real action. I don't want to be helping to comment on the action. I want a part of the real action." But no, no attempt was made to recruit.

Q: Did you have regular training and all that?

THAYER: I was a member of the Class of September 1956. It's a class that Loy Henderson, former under secretary of state, is alleged to have commented on during a 1960 or '61 visit to Vientiane. He supposedly asked one of my classmates when he had come into the Foreign Service. He said "1956."

And Loy Henderson said, "Oh, that was the year they took everybody in."

Anyhow, that was when I came in, September '56. And we were given a choice of assignments, asked to list preferences, one, two, three. I listed Hong Kong as my first preference for reasons that had more to do with the romance of the Foreign Service and China than everything else. I remember listing Beirut as second. Beirut was then one of the great posts to serve in.

Q: The pearl of the Middle East. The Paris of the Middle East.

THAYER: And what is now known as Kinshasa, Leopoldville in those days, as my third choice. Luckily, I got Hong Kong.

Q: What were you doing in Hong Kong?

THAYER: I started out as a visa officer, and I was on the visa line handling particularly spouses and minor children of American citizens. I did that for most of the two years I was in Hong Kong, two and a half years. I also served, for about six months, as the American Services officer. Although I'm basically a political officer, I really enjoyed the visa work. Although I never felt it was as prestigious as the political work in the big consulate in Hong Kong, I learned a tremendous amount because we were dealing face to face with people coming out of China. I just learned one hell of a lot about China.

Q: Could you give a little idea of the atmosphere of what a visa officer was doing? Because Chinese visas in those days were always a very difficult job.

THAYER: In Hong Kong, virtually all the immigrant visas I handled were the M-1 and M-2 visas. Virtually all of my cases were from the south. The majority of them were from Taishan County.

Q: Taishan being near Canton?

THAYER: Being near Canton. Hong Kong being near Canton, most of the people coming into our consulate were from Taishan on their way to the States. Taishan was the traditional origin of Chinese immigrants to the States. There was a study done a year before or two years before I arrived, which included a calculation that about 85 percent of the cases we were working with were fraudulently based. That is to say, the petitioners in the States had come in on phony slots opened by their fathers presence in the States, and their parents' declaration to the Immigration Service that they had a certain number of sons back in China. But they had sold off those slots to a lot of the people, the next generation. This group had gone to the U.S. before I got to Hong Kong. They were, at that time, filing

petitions in turn, for their wives and children. The petitioners had gone to the States with false names, most of them. So their wives and children, with false names also, had to make up all kinds of paper stories in order to be legitimized as the subject of the petition. And so they were coming to us with all kinds of lies. Even though the basic relationships, by the time I got there, were mostly correct, the names, the identities, claimed home villages—many of them were false.

When I was there, the consulate was in the second year of a million dollar anti-fraud program where a bunch of security officers were hired to work with local authorities to get to the bottom of the fraud in the Chinese applications. So there was an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust that exceeds the situation in most places.

Illustrating this, the kind of mentality that was around in our consulate, I went off on a raid in Macao with one of our investigative officers and his Chinese local investigator. We went off to Macao, and we raided. We literally charged up the back stairs of a rickety old house to raid, in the first case, an apartment on the third or fourth floor where we tore the place apart looking for documents demonstrating the real identify of applicants that were before us applying for visas. We had no warrant. We had nothing at all. I went along as an observer. But my moral outrage at what we were doing only came in retrospect. At the time, I wasn't sensitive to this, quite to my shame today. But this is the kind of thing that we were doing in those days.

But I got to Hong Kong in May of '57, and Hong Kong was still quite a primitive place, nowhere near as crowded as it is now, and very much a place for refugees. We were processing refugees, basically, is what we were doing.

Q: What did this do to you and your fellow consuls? Did this have an effect? I mean, when you've got 85 percent fraud or something like that, did it turn you all into cynics and pretty nasty people to deal with as bureaucrats?

THAYER: My guess is that most consular officers, if they haven't served in China, have served in comparable places where the fraud is very, very high. And I certainly went through stages, and I think most of my colleagues went through stages—initially of sympathy, then of an outrage at being lied to day after day after day, and ultimately passing through that sense of outrage to a feeling of resignation and compassion. I certainly went through all three of those periods in Hong Kong.

But the fraud was permeating before I got there. An American consular officer had been jailed for selling visas, quite a sensational case at the time. Fraud was a way of life. Yet we became quite good friends with some of the immigration attorneys who came in. In fact, while I served in Taiwan, this 1980's decade, I again saw one of the old immigration attorneys for Hong Kong cases, Jack Chow, who had some pretty bad cases but always managed to keep up good relations with the visa officers.

But, yes, it created attitudes that, in retrospect, were regrettable, are regrettable. And it created a certain degree of arrogance, a colonialist mentality. And in those days, Hong Kong was very much a colony. People called Chinese “boys.” The Foreign Correspondents Club and the American Club were two main scenes of activities, and they had a “colonialist” flavor. While there were friendships, certainly close friendships between many of the consulate employees and the Chinese, the Chinese intellectuals and their senior local employees and so forth, there was, on the visa front, a different set of relationships, and they were, in many respects, mutually hostile—the visa officer angry at being exploited himself and his country being exploited from his perspective; the visa applicant, as is still the case, simply anxious one way or the other, ethics be damned, to get to the States. It's still the situation.

Q: Did you get any chance there to get into the political reporting side or anything like that?

THAYER: As visa officers, we were encouraged mildly to send along political information to the political officers. And I made good friends in the political section, several of whom

are among my good friends today, and would quite often confer with them about things that I had found. Occasionally I would send up a report. But we were pretty overwhelmed with visa work, as is the case most places, and there wasn't as much production out of the visa section for political or economic purposes as there probably could have been. However, there wasn't an intersectional disdain as there is in some embassies, and there was a good deal of cooperative work.

Q: What was your attitude at that time towards the People's Republic of China, in other words Red China, at that time?

THAYER: Well, my attitude was based, you have to understand, mostly on ignorance, because I'd never had any formal study of China. But I read the FBIS and I...

Q: FBIS being?

THAYER: The Foreign Broadcast Information Service translation of Chinese broadcasts. I read that every day, along with the consulate's own translations and other material. I otherwise tried to keep up with what was going on or learn about what was going on in China. I took a course at Hong Kong University in the economy of China. A lot of my attitude, I remember, could be illustrated by a conversation I had with Ambassador Bohlen, now dead, whose wife's name was Thayer and is a second cousin of my father. He was ambassador to Manila at that time, having been shipped out by Dulles for a variety of domestic political reasons. He and his wife, Avis, came over to Hong Kong. And I remember they asked me to lunch, a very kind thing. I didn't know them well at all, but we were distantly related. I remember talking to Bohlen about my attitude toward China. I said, “Reading the FBIS every day, it makes me really despair at the U.S. and the Chinese ever working out some livable arrangement. The generation that is being schooled today”—that was in the '50s—”is hearing nothing but very vituperative anti-American propaganda. And so these kids are going to grow up with great antagonism, perhaps irreversible, toward the United States.”

Ambassador Bohlen, in a kindly way, pooh-poohed this, saying that he didn't think that the effect would be permanent. And he said, “Anyway, Harry, you ought to remember something.” He said, “Governments deal with governments, and the function of the diplomacy is to deal with the government, not with the people. And governments will not always see things in the same way as the people do.” That was an interesting comment.

But my attitude was one more of curiosity rather than of hostility. I remember asking Consul General Drumright when I was on duty one Saturday morning—Drumright being an old-line, rather right-wing Foreign Service officer who escaped the purges. And I asked him did he ever think we would go back to China during my professional lifetime. And he said, “Oh, yes.” He said, “I have no doubt that we'll go back. The Chinese will become democratic again, or at least the communists will fall, and we'll reopen the same number of posts that we used to have.” But my attitude was more of curiosity and learning. I really was learning, didn't pretend to be an expert. It wasn't hostility. It was interest.

Q: You were around the China hands. This was the time when it was absolutely an untouchable subject to talk about recognizing, as we all called it in those days, Red China. But what about within your cohorts and all? Did you see this as being a worthy—I mean, not a worthy goal, but that we were probably going to recognize Communist China, or we're going to have to wait for the great revolution that was in store or whatever you want to call a non-communist government?

THAYER: I don't remember clearly any single conversation I had on this subject with my colleagues there. I think there was a general acceptance of the impossibility of doing anything with the Chinese under then current conditions, that there were a lot of tangled knots that had to be untangled. And the beginnings of that were taking place in Europe: in Geneva, then Warsaw (our bilateral ambassador-level talks). But I don't think anybody that I was aware of saw a near-term solution to it. So we were just living with it.

But, at the same time, I think most of us young fellows were in the business because we wanted to deal with the China problem and were interested in the China problem as a diplomatic problem and implicitly a problem to be solved, implicitly someday we would solve it. So I think that was the context in which we were working.

I remember some conversations about the possibilities of Chiang Kai-shek retaking the mainland, somehow going back to the mainland. Still that wasn't an important part of our thinking. The important part of the thinking was there's a problem there that had to be solved. We didn't quite know how it was going to be solved.

Q: Did you feel sort of a heavy hand at all? I mean, obviously you were at a much lower level, so you wouldn't, but that one had to really watch what one said about China? I'm thinking because of the McCarthy era and all this, that you couldn't really express how you felt.

THAYER: I didn't feel that terribly myself, because I wasn't that important. But I remember some discussion by others, older Foreign Service officers there, who did feel that they needed to pull some punches specifically because of concern about the psychology of Washington. And whether this amounted to not reporting things that they felt rather than reporting—I don't think it meant not reporting facts, it's just that one was cautious. And I remember at about the same time, although it was in Washington, either just before I was in Hong Kong or just after, there was some concern about being seen reading a communist publication on the bus, for example. But I wasn't terribly conscious of this as a factor in Hong Kong.

Q: Then your first tour was over and you went back to the Department in 1959. What were you doing there?

THAYER: Well, I went back to the Department to be a post management officer in the executive office of the East Asia Bureau with responsibility for personnel and funds for

Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, for the embassies and the consulate general there. I might say that about halfway through the Hong Kong experience my then wife and I talked over what we would do next and whether our experience in Hong Kong had confirmed sufficiently our interest and willingness to devote a career to Asia and China. We explicitly came to the decision that, yes, our interest was genuine. We wanted to stay in it. My wife had gotten quite a lot of interest in Chinese art and other things. I applied for the Chinese language program in Taichung (Taiwan), and was accepted in that program, the Foreign Service Institute's Chinese language and area training.

I was accepted for that program, but at the last minute, when I was to leave Hong Kong for the U.S. on home leave, they changed my assignment to go back to East Asia Bureau and serve as a post management officer. I was then over thirty and felt my language-learning capability was going to fade pretty fast. I had been studying an hour a day in Hong Kong religiously and doing quite a bit of homework. But I was outraged at this sudden deprivation and consignment to administrative work in Washington instead of proceeding on the China track and, before leaving Hong Kong, fought it by telegram and letter and every way I could. But I was deemed indispensable for post management and went back as a post management officer.

Q: How did that play out then?

THAYER: Well, it played out like so many things. I got interested in it, and I learned a lot about how the Foreign Service is run. They put me in the East Asia Bureau while Walter Robertson was still there, which gave me kind of a taste of things. And it was quite instructive. I learned a lot about the Foreign Service and working in the bureaucracy. And I learned a lot about management and all these things, learned a lot about Congress, writing justifications for funds to the Hill. That was all quite instructive. I also met a lot of the personalities involved in China and Asia affairs. I also, in May of 1961, suddenly got yanked off to go on a trip as a coat-holder for LBJ when he was vice president, went around the world as an aide to this LBJ first around-the-world trip.

Q: This was a rather famous one, wasn't it?

THAYER: The famous one, May of '61. We went out to tell Diem in Vietnam that we would support him forever, but we went to Guam and Midway and Manila and Taipei, Hong Kong, Saigon, Bangkok, New Delhi, Karachi, Athens, Wheelus Air Force Base (Libya), Bermuda, and Washington. And it was the Goddamnedest trip I've ever made, learned a lot, and I was a physical wreck at the end of it. But it was an eye-opener and a lot of fun.

Q: I realize that you were pretty far down the pecking line, but did you see anything of LBJ in action?

THAYER: I saw a good deal of LBJ in action. I was on his plane, in the first place. Even between Washington and Travis Air Force Base I saw him in action. We put down at Travis.

Q: That's in California.

THAYER: Right. Travis Air Force Base in California. We were on our way to Honolulu, the first substantive stop, where LBJ was to open the East-West Center. And I don't want to make this too long, but it's kind of illustrative. Bill Crockett, a senior State administrator, was on the trip. Bill Crockett was a guy in whom LBJ did have confidence, so Crockett ended up traveling with Johnson wherever he went. And Crockett was my super boss in our group. Along on this trip on the substantive side was “China” Ed Martin, along with Dick Ericson, who was then a special assistant to the EA front office.

Anyhow, Crockett was my basic boss, and I was told on the airplane, as we began to fly across the United States with Crockett, that, “You, Harry, have got to go up front (of the 707) and answer this message on the radio, get a message sent on the plane's radio to Honolulu about the motorcade in Honolulu. There's a lot of problems with this motorcade. We want you to go up and send this message.” I wasn't drafting the message. I was just a messenger boy. In any event, with the message in hand, I had to walk up front.

Incidentally, there were two 707s on this trip. One was for the press, and one was for the official group.

LBJ was spread across the center aisle (the only aisle) up in the front of the plane where there were tables in a VIP configuration. But his long legs were stretched across the aisle as he was talking with one of the young secretaries. I had to say, “Excuse me, Mr. Vice President” to get up to the communications place. So I went by, and I said, “Excuse me, Mr. Vice President.” I went up and I sent the message or called the message to Honolulu about the Goddamn motorcade. Then I came back and said, “Excuse me, Mr. Vice President.” And he had to pull in his long legs, gave me a dirty look. About ten minutes later Crockett said, “Harry, I want you to go up there and send this other message.”

I said, “You know, the vice president is giving me some very dirty looks there.”

He said, “Send the message.”

So I walked up there, and I said, “Excuse me, Mr. Vice President.” He had to pull his legs back in and stop his conversation with this young luscious that he was talking to and gave me a very nasty look. And I went up and sent the message and came back, and there were his legs spread out in front. To my horror I had to say again, “Excuse me, Mr. Vice President.”

And the vice president looked me right in the eye. He said, “Son, if you do this once again, I'm going to put poison in your soup.” [Laughter]

And as I remember, I said something like, “In that case, Mr. Vice President, I'll have to get a taster.” I really remember I said it, but I'm really not sure. Anyhow, that was my first exposure to LBJ.

I will say, there are a lot of other tales I could tell about LBJ, but one thing on this trip, well, LBJ was really terribly hard to deal with. Everybody found him very hard to deal with. Lady

Bird was the balance. And she was often nudging the vice president to be a little bit more polite, to take into account, to praise and so forth, the Foreign Service people that were with him.

I might say, in connection with the LBJ trip—it's of some historical interest—two or three days before we left for this trip, which was very quickly assembled and posts were added the last minute, embassies were going crazy with these instructions- -all of us got called up to the under secretary's office, who was then Chester Bowles. This was my first presence in an under secretary's office. In any event, Ed Martin and Bill Crockett and others were up there, and Chester Bowles gave us a very serious talk. He told us how important this trip was from the administration's viewpoint, underlining the fact—not saying anything about [President John F.] Kennedy wanting to get Johnson out of town or other more narrow political reasons— but underlining the fact that this was going to be LBJ's first real exposure to U.S. diplomacy and certainly to Vietnam. He stressed that it was very important to the president that LBJ come back feeling more sympathetic to U.S. foreign interests and particularly to the president's interests.

Therefore, our responsibility was, among other things, to make this trip as pleasant an experience for LBJ as possible. And we were to accommodate as much as possible where we could to LBJ's demands even if they seemed unreasonable. The point being that the president needed LBJ's support more than he felt he then had. This is May of 1961. And our serious purpose, overriding purpose, was to have LBJ return with a more sophisticated and stronger support for what the president was trying to do.

Q: That's interesting. This was toward the end, wasn't it?

THAYER: May of '61, right.

Q: And then did you get your Chinese training?

THAYER: That summer of '61, I went direct to Taiwan to start training in Taiwan. And I ended up staying there two years, partly because of an accident I had. It put me out of training for a while. At the end of those two years in Taichung, which I loved, I had initially expected to go to Phnom Penh in one of the China-watching posts, combining French and Chinese. I had French and I had learned Chinese. But something happened about the Phnom Penh assignment. I ended up opting for Taipei, and I went down to Taipei as my first assignment in 1963 after language school.

Q: Were you getting any indoctrination as you went through your training? I went through Serbian training, and we had Serbian teachers who were trying their best to turn us into real strong anti-Titoists. Really it didn't have much effect. But I was wondering whether because of the training, were you getting the KMT side of things from your language teachers?

THAYER: To some extent. And we were conscious that everything we were doing was being reported to the regime in Taipei. Some of the teachers were hard-line. Some of the teachers were very, very anti-KMT, and that came through in the teaching. The language school even then, however, was allowed to teach from original communist materials. We learned from Mao's writings, and the People's Daily. These Materials weren't allowed to go out of the building, but we were allowed to consult them. So it was a reasonably balanced thing. But I will say, from the experiences of my last job as dean of the language school, the problem of getting native speakers to train without giving a little free political indoctrination one way or another is still with us.

Q: Oh, yes. [Laughter] Well, it sounds like you had it a little better. There is nothing more stubborn than a Serb, and these two were cousins, and they were very strong.

What were you doing in Taipei? You were there from '63 to '66.

THAYER: I was there from '63 to '66. I went down there as an economic commercial officer covering industry — textiles and book piracy were the two main things I covered. But I also did odds and ends of other things. And we did our first bilateral textile negotiation a few months after I arrived. It was a tremendously instructive experience for me being the embassy person on this beat.

I will say that my newspaper background reared its historic head just before I went down to Taipei. The PAO in Taipei at that time tried to persuade the DCM and myself that I should go to USIS and help him put together a weekly newspaper and work full time in USIS. I fought this very hard in a long memorandum written from the language school to the DCM in which I gave my background and aspirations and said that I'd been derailed once from Taichung, I was over thirty, I'd never done any substantive work, and I wanted to get on with my substantive career, and I figured USIS would be a diversion.

That view was finally accepted, and I went as an economic commercial officer, served in that job for a year, as the only Chinese language officer in the section. After home leave I came back and worked in the political section.

Q: Harry, could you tell me a little more about these textile negotiations? Then we'll come to the book piracy issue. Because both of these seem to be, in many ways, the very core of our relationship with Taipei. I mean, these are not minor subjects, are they, in those days, anyway?

THAYER: Well, they weren't minor subjects in those days. We had completed a textile agreement with Japan. I think we had not done so with anybody else at that point. The importance of the negotiation, the commercial importance is well understood, the domestic pressures here, perhaps, are well understood. To me, the really enlightening part of that effort was the problem of coordinating and getting a consensus among U.S. domestic interests as manifested in the various departmental representatives who were there—

the Labor Department, the Commerce Department, the State Department. These were all participants in the negotiations.

The relationships with the Chinese seemed to be a lot less acrimonious than the relationships among the American negotiators. As a State Department officer, I was very much a creature of the chief negotiator who was a State Department officer himself. And I was quite flabbergasted as a relatively naive Foreign Service officer to find the American side conniving with the Chinese side to bypass one of the American negotiators. Well, this isn't a new idea to older hands, but to me it was an eye-opener. It was also, to me, very satisfying that, as a Chinese language officer, I could use my Chinese, and that was useful. I mean, that was rewarding for me. Parenthetically, I'll say that in that same job I worked on a PL 480 agreement.

Q: Would you explain what the PL 480 agreement was?

THAYER: Public Law 480, which allowed for the sale of American agricultural commodities repaid in foreign currencies which were normally spent, of course, in the host country. The thing I most remember about the PL 480 agreement was that I was charged with verifying that the Chinese version conformed with the American version. I was able to find that in a number of respects the Chinese version was imperfectly translated and was able to get it translated correctly. As a language officer, that was very gratifying that I could do that.

Anyhow, the textile negotiations have been followed by many bilaterals with Taiwan. Subsequently I, twenty years later, when I headed the PRC desk, was involved in our first textile negotiations with the Communist Chinese.

Q: Well, how did the book piracy issue come up? Could you explain what the problem was?

THAYER: Yes. The problem of the book piracy in those days was that the Chinese were not only copying without authorization American books, including the encyclopedias, but

were exporting these publications back to the United States. And it did not sit well with the American publishers to find their prices undercut by, say, 90 percent in their own territory.

Q: I think many of us benefitted by these overseas. I mean, they were tut-tut. But I have several books which...

THAYER: Well, that's what we all did. An encyclopedia from Taiwan was a very well-known commodity available to Foreign Service officers. In any event, in 1963 and 1964, when I worked on this problem, I took it quite seriously. We were getting a lot of flak, Congress and so forth. I worked with a department director at the Taiwan Ministry of Interior, who, himself, was convinced that Taiwan for its own image had to do something about the problem. And he and I worked very closely together.

At the same time, when I came back to the United States on consultation I went to New York and met with the American Publishers Association to try to encourage them to work with us and take the Chinese bureaucracy in good faith, treat them in good faith, and together, as the saying goes, we could make progress. In fact, we did make some progress when I was there, and within a year or two, exports to the United States had stopped. The Chinese had instituted procedures to stop the export to the United States of Taiwan-pirated books. And I don't mean it all halted completely, but the Chinese regulations were in place and firmly enough so that the embassy issued strict instructions against any of our personnel taking stuff back as being against both U.S. and Chinese laws. I don't know that it was ever implemented properly, but the Chinese customs and the American customs both inspected for pirated books, and pirated books that were attempted to be taken out of Taiwan were confiscated, and I think there were some penalties imposed.

So that was a rewarding thing. It taught me something about negotiations. It also seemed like a worthwhile thing to put some imagination and energy into, which I did. And it was

also, if I may say so, a palpable kind of problem that had some sex appeal to it. Our ambassador gave me a lot of support.

Q: Our ambassador at that time was?

THAYER: Was Jerauld Wright.

Q: Admiral Jerauld Wright.

THAYER: Retired admiral, who is still in Washington and quite active, a very nice gent, and he gave me terrific support—demarches to the foreign minister and so forth—in effect, giving support to the Chinese department director whose name I still remember was Hsiung—a Chinese character for bear— who actually, more or less, single-handedly reversed Taiwan's position. Mr. Hsiung was a very fine gent. But the ambassador was supportive, and it was one of those things that Foreign Service officers put a lot of energy into, get a lot of satisfaction from, but it passes and nobody remembers what you did. But it's part of the fun of being in the Foreign Service.

Q: Then you worked on the economic side, and then you moved over, you say, to what, the political side?

THAYER: To the political side. We had a five- or six-man political section.

Q: Of course, in those days, that was our representation to China.

THAYER: Right. And Embassy Taipei was a lot more important in the '50s and the '60s, particularly in the early '60s than subsequent to the [Secretary of State Henry] Kissinger. As a political officer, I was covering two things. One was some of the central government organizations, including the KMT central committee, and the other was the Taiwanese and local governments.

In this connection, I began to study Taiwanese. So I studied one hour a day Mandarin, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and one hour a day Taiwanese, Tuesday and Thursday. Taiwanese was important because part of my job, I'm delighted to say, was to get out of the embassy and go around the island and meet the local politicians, the magistrates, the KMT county chairmen, the newspaper publishers and so forth. That was terrific fun. I would just go off on my own for a week and wouldn't have a necktie on, and go around the island and meet people and use my Chinese full time. It was terrific fun.

Q: I wonder if you could give, at this point, how you saw the situation on Taiwan, I mean, both with a central government but also relations with the Taiwanese and the effectiveness, and lack thereof.

THAYER: Well, I didn't see it as clearly then as I do now. But I saw the Taiwanese probably as a lot more meaningfully discontented than they were. That is to say, Taiwanese did feel exploited. Chiang Ching-kuo was just beginning to have some effect in bringing Taiwanese into the...

Q: Who was he?

THAYER: Chiang Ching-kuo was the son of Chiang Kai-shek. He became deputy defense minister when I was there, became defense minister, too, when I was there. But he was responsible for opening the KMT more and more to Taiwanese. Taiwanese were very much in the KMT when I was there, but there was a lot of anti-KMT sentiment, particularly among the Taiwanese intellectuals. There was a good deal of apparent sentiment, nostalgia, for the Japanese. Some of this was phoney. Some of this was real. In any event, in the 60's I think I exaggerated the importance of the anti-KMT sentiment in terms of the ability of the Taiwanese, anti-KMT Taiwanese, to turn their antagonism into dramatic pressure against the regime.

I remember postulating in a paper (that I never did send forward because I didn't really believe it in the end; I talked myself out of it in the process of writing) that, if Chiang Kai-shek then were suddenly to die and there was some kind of economic downturn, the Taiwanese would actually riot to the point of using physical power against the regime. And I had come to the point, I thought, of believing that. But when I wrote it out, I realized I didn't believe it.

Q: This raises a point I think that's interesting. I'd like you to comment on it. Going back to the time you were there and how you saw things, when one reads newspaper columnists now fifty years ago or something, they tend to see things in apocalyptic terms. I mean, if this doesn't happen, very horrible things or major things will happen, rather than things sort of working their way out. It's easier to get a handle on these things if you're just writing. Do you think that this, sort of in political reporting, too—I mean, the same process of not seeing things maybe in as gradualistic terms as they might be in more sort of black and white?

THAYER: I saw things more in black and white than, in retrospect, was accurate, certainly. But I found the process of writing, particularly a long think-piece, helped mature my own thinking. I would say, incidentally, that when I got to Taiwan, well, I had had four or five years of newspaper experience and supposedly a good education and so forth, but I was really quite naive about foreign policy and diplomacy. And when I was in the economic section, I participated in drafting the first part of an annual posture statement for the embassy in which I went along with a rather wild and simplistic set of recommendations for U.S.-China policy, a paper which I hope never surfaces, because I think, in retrospect, it was so bad— so bad and so simplistic. Well, I just make that point. I imagine many officers have gone through the same thing. But this was not a good paper even while I was an economic officer.

As a political officer, I saw a lot of the Taiwanese, sympathized with them, and let myself be influenced, I think more than a more mature officer would have, by their description of

the facts and by their perspectives, although I discounted a great deal of what they said about their economic well being, because I could see how well they lived compared to how I know they had lived ten years earlier, and the statistics were there also. So I wasn't taken in entirely. But my sympathies certainly were with them, and, therefore, I probably exaggerated, in my own thinking, their importance. I don't think it affected my reporting at all except that by my interest in the Taiwanese, in the local politicians' attitudes, I was able to get better access to them, and, therefore, I was able to report more fully what they were thinking and what they were saying.

It's when the judgment came as to how important this was that—others were making these judgments in any case. I was a junior officer, and there were level heads around, and I wasn't pushing a particular line. I was just reporting. I loved reporting. I loved getting out and talking to people, figuring out what they were thinking, trying to write it in an understandable and interesting way and drawing some small conclusions from it. I enjoyed that part of it, throwing light on dark corners.

Q: How did the political section, particularly, and yourself look upon the KMT—the Kuomintang—as a government, its effectiveness, its value?

THAYER: Well, I think we thought it was effective. We believed and said in our briefings to newcomers and newspapermen and so forth how important it was for the free world to have a strong Taiwan, a viable economy, a military force, Taiwan as a major part of the Pacific chain of democratic or at least non-communist states. We believed in the unpleasant nature of the communist regime, indeed. I think all of us saw the imperfections of the Taiwan regime at that time, as did many in the regime itself. I think we had a rather healthy attitude. We weren't in the bag of the regime. That is to say, our embassy was not a spokesman for the regime, although there were times, particularly in the evolutionary period of the early '60s, when, for example, on the issue of Mongolia, which occurred just before I came down to Taipei...

Q: The issue being?

THAYER: Being Mongolia's seat in the UN. Ambassador Drumright, I think, got into a big rhubarb with the Kennedy administration over that. And there were other times when our embassy as a whole, I think, saw things a little more sympathetic to the KMT regime than perhaps Washington did. But I don't think egregiously so. We had some very smart and able people at the leadership of the embassy when I was there.

Q: Who were they?

THAYER: When I arrived, Ralph Clough was the DCM, and Ralph was one of our best China language and area professionals. His spoken Chinese is terrific. But he's a tremendously wise person and was not going to be anybody's fool. I'm sure that his advice to our series of ambassadors was always good. He was in charge a lot of the time. He was a very good man, is a very good man still.

Q: Yes, we had a good interview with him. Marshall Green did it, by the way.

THAYER: Well, Ralph was there, and then he was succeeded by Art Hummel, who has had a wonderful career. Art was a very good DCM, very able with the Chinese, also a very level-headed guy. So we weren't a bunch of patsies for the regime. We very much had our eye on U.S. interests. I think I say this collectively. I'm speaking more of the others senior to me who were in the embassy.

Q: How about a view of Red China in those days? It was going through tremendous turmoil at this point in the mid-'60s. How did you view this? Did you think of this as an awesome power or a disintegrating power? What did you think?

THAYER: Well, you have to remember, in those days, China had its first nuclear test in 1964, first nuclear device. It had beaten up the Indians in '61, I guess. We had the Quemoy issue in '58. Communist China was a threat, and we saw it as a threat. We saw—

at least I did—the KMT as, at that point, the only sensible part of China to support. Maybe eventually something else would happen, but in those days there wasn't much doubt as to what we needed to do in our relationship with the KMT. I think there was a fair amount of discussion of the need for our relationship with the PRC to evolve more, and that was manifested in things that were done during the Kennedy administration, including the Hilsman speech in '63—Assistant Secretary Hilsman—in which he said, in effect, that Communist China was there to be dealt with. So there was a degree of realism, but we didn't see any rapid evolution about to take place.

Q: Do you recall how you felt about China and the Soviet Union? Was it still as close as a lips-to-teeth type situation, or how did you see it then?

THAYER: I think I understood that the split had taken place. The Soviets had withdrawn personnel and all that. I never saw China as a creature of the Soviet Union, anyhow, and we certainly didn't, in those days, think that it was. There were, you know, obvious rifts. I can't remember all the details now. But there were problems within the PRC, within the Chinese Communist Party, and there were the tremendous economic problems in the early '60s, the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward.

We saw the PRC as a threat but also knew it was in trouble. But there wasn't much doubt—I don't think there was much doubt in those days—that our alliance with the KMT was important to U.S. interests. I saw it in too simplistic terms, but I think that, generally speaking, people were sophisticated about it.

Q: Were there any major incidents that you were involved in or anything during this time you were on Taipei?

THAYER: No, the riots of '57 were...

Q: That's when they sacked the embassy.

THAYER: When the Chinese sacked the embassy—were a very important memory to us all, and part of the memory of our embassy institution. We were all sensitive about that. When I was in language school, there were a lot of rumors that Chiang was going to attack some piece of Fujian and there was a big excitement, seen the distance from the language school. But, actually, the three years I was in the embassy, there weren't any really dramatic incidents that I can remember. We didn't go through a major change of regime. There were no other major events that took place. I wouldn't call it a placid time, but relatively so.

Q: You came back and you were in INR [Intelligence and Research] then, weren't you?

THAYER: No, actually I came back to be on the Taiwan desk.

Q: You left in '66?

THAYER: Left Taiwan in '66 and came on the Taiwan desk, which was a four-man desk, and I was the low man. Then I became deputy director for my second year there. Much of the time I was handling economic questions as well as being the desk-level authority on the local politics side because of my own experience in Taiwan.

Q: Was there any residue of the old China lobby from Congress? Did you feel this breathing down your neck or not, or had this pretty well been dissipated?

THAYER: By that time, the China lobby had pretty well dissipated, but it was still there, and some of the well-known figures of the China lobby were around. And because of our dealing with the Taiwan Embassy, the Republic of China Embassy, we saw a lot of these folks—Walter Judd, for example. When I got to the U.N. in 1971 during the Chinese representation effort, the China lobby was exemplified by the Committee of One Million, which was the new manifestation of the China lobby. It was still very active. But as a desk officer, no, there wasn't much involvement.

Q: You then spent a while with the Intelligence and Research Division?

THAYER: No, I went back to serve on the Taiwan desk for two years, and then I went over as deputy director of PRC affairs. So '66 to '68 I was on Taiwan and Taiwan affairs, and '68 to '70 I was on PRC affairs.

Q: How did we view the PRC? This was the time of our major commitment in Vietnam. How did we view the role of the PRC at that time?

THAYER: Well, we viewed the PRC as supporting Vietnam, of course. But we also—I say "we," the people on the desk before I got there as well as when I was there—we were concerned that our hostilities with Vietnam did not spill over unduly into the U.S.-PRC relationship. The Warsaw talks were continuing at that time. We also had other things in mind to do with the PRC that would reduce the tension between us. We sought to avoid gratuitously exacerbating a relationship with the PRC, exacerbation as a corollary to our hostilities with Vietnam.

Q: You must have then gone a bit head-to-head with the military from time to time, didn't you? Because we were flying bombing raids very close to the Chinese border.

THAYER: Well, there were.

Q: The military, from what I understand, felt the State Department was trying to get a little too precious.

THAYER: Perhaps so. My recollection of what actually we did with the military is not so clear. But I remember a pilot being shot down over Hainan, for example, and he evidently had gotten off course. We didn't think this contributed to U.S.-PRC relations. And, as I remember, we let our views be known about that. It was also during this period that the Seventh Fleet patrols between Taiwan and the mainland which were merely symbolic,

were reduced. I can't remember at which point they were eliminated, but they were reduced, in any case.

In those days, we were looking for ways to improve the relationship with the PRC and were trying various things, including in the Warsaw channel but also in other ways to reduce the tension with the PRC. I was deputy to Paul Kreisberg, who was the director, and Don Anderson was the number three man and was our interpreter at the Warsaw talks. And he and Paul would go off to Warsaw talks while I ran the office. But Vietnam was still very much in the way of improvement of U.S.-PRC relations.

Q: Did the idea crop up from time to time of somehow using the Republic of China's troops at all as a factor in the Vietnam thing, or was this something that we—

THAYER: I don't remember any specifics on this, but I think it was well understood by everybody that we didn't want to complicate the Vietnam exercise or U.S.-PRC relations by the introduction of KMT troops. I will just mention parenthetically that while I was still in Taiwan, I did accompany the ambassador in to see the foreign minister to ask for Taiwan secondary support of some kind, contribution of medical supplies, I think. And, of course, there were some well-known refueling activities that took place out of Taiwan in those days, I think involving KC-135s. So that was there.

But back to the period of '68 to '70, there were various things that were happening, of course, especially the Sino-Soviet clashes on the Ussuri River which occurred in the later period. We were looking for opportunities to improve our relationship with the PRC and did everything we could to keep the Vietnam thing from interfering with that.

Q: Did [Secretary of State] Dean Rusk reach in and tap any of you? Did you get any feel for his attitude towards the PRC?

THAYER: Yes, but I would say my feel was secondhand, very much so. I was in his presence from time to time, I guess, but didn't have much direct dealings with him. He

was pretty hard-line, articulating the line including the PRC threat to Southeast Asia and so forth. We were also trying to open relations with Mongolia in those days, and he, I remember, did not support certain memos that were sent up proposing we do this or that to open negotiations or relations with Mongolia. But, generally, I think we understood that the secretary's posture was hard-line against the PRC.

Q: Then you moved to the United Nations from the War College?

THAYER: Yes. I went to the War College for a year and then moved to the UN in '71. I actually expected to go to Africa on my post-War College tour and so I took the War College African trip. But I ended up not going to West Africa as I thought I was going to. I ended up going to the UN.

Q: What were you doing with the UN?

THAYER: I went to the UN as the deputy counselor for political/security affairs under Mike Newlin, with global responsibilities. But I went there initially to be the staff coordinator for all the Chinese representation issue activities. I went the summer of '71, just about the time that we put forward our proposal for dual representation; that is, presence in the UN General Assembly of both the PRC reps and the Republic of China reps. The Security Council seat—this evolved a little later—the Security Council seat was to be given to the PRC.

Q: The political context at this time, [Richard M.] Nixon was the president, but we had not yet made our overt opening to the PRC, had we?

THAYER: That's right. Nixon was the president when I went to New York in early July of '71. It was in the context of the UN's support for the PRC increasing, so it was questionable that we would be able to hold the line on the PRC. With our dual representation proposal we were adjusting to this political reality. Very shortly after I arrived on duty in New York, Kissinger's trip to the PRC was revealed, and that put the

dual representation issue in a new context where the U.S., on the one hand, was trying to preserve a seat for the Taiwan regime at the same time as actively playing footsie with the authorities in Beijing. So that was a complicating factor in the so-called “Chirep” issue as it played out in 1971.

Q: How did you operate? The Chirep problem was something that absorbed our United Nations activities and also many of our relations abroad of getting people to make sure that the PRC was not represented in the United Nations. This went on for years, and you were there at sort of the end of this whole thing. How did you find this work at sort of the seat of the whole thing in the United Nations? How did you operate in this?

THAYER: Well, you're right. The Chinese representation issue had been with us forever, and I can remember, in 1961, Paul Kreisberg, when he was in INR, telling me that INR and others were then exploring some new possibility for a formula for Chinese representation. In 1971, my philosophical context was that Taiwan was a viable entity; I didn't expect Taiwan ever to regain the mainland, but it was a viable entity and a good member of the UN and so forth, and it was appropriate that it continue to be represented in the UN.

On the other hand, the PRC—whatever kind of shambles it was in—it was also, in the end, an entity, a quarter of the world's population and so forth, and it should be represented in the UN, too. So the dual representation issue seemed to me to conform with reality at a certain level, at a logical level. It was not reality at the political level, because the PRC didn't want to put up with dual representation, and the PRC increasingly held the cards. But it was a worthy goal if we could have pulled it off, and we came close—within two votes— on the important question resolution. We came within two votes of pulling it off that year. Now, if we'd pulled it off that year, certainly there's a good chance the next year we would have lost it. But, nonetheless, it was worth it and also a matter of good faith. It was worth our trying to do it.

Q: Was there ever any feeling on the part of the Republic of China representation to say, "Okay, the hell with this. We're a separate country, and we're Taiwan," or something like this?

THAYER: It was never manifested, any inclination toward going for a status of an independent Taiwan.

Q: Because that would have probably been much more sellable, wouldn't it?

THAYER: Well, it might have been. But, in the end, no, because the PRC was against it, and the majority of UN members recognized the importance of the PRC and were not prepared to cross the PRC. But the leadership of Taiwan and certainly the mainlanders, who were their diplomatic servants, diplomatic officers, from the ambassador on down, adhered to a one-China view with their government as being the legitimate government of that one China. They swallowed hard with the idea of the Security Council seat being taken over by the PRC. They saw everything as in a one-China context. This was a very deeply felt conviction on the part of the representatives of Taiwan. We worked very intimately with the Taiwan group and with Japan, as well as a whole group of co-sponsors. But the group in Taiwan worked hard to preserve their seat. And then-Ambassador [George] Bush and others worked extremely hard. Eighteen hours a day was nothing in those lobbying exercises. I might say a word about the lobbying.

Q: I'd like to hear that, yes.

THAYER: It was the largest lobbying exercise we'd ever undertaken. I was coordinator of this in the New York side. Harvey Feldman, also a Chinese language officer, was in IO/UNP (U.N. Political Affairs). He was one of the people who had put together this dual representation proposal. We were lobbying like hell in New York, and we were lobbying like hell in capitals abroad. And our job, among others, was to coordinate this lobbying. So one of the problems that I had was simply to keep track, to make sure that we knew

what the hell we were doing and had done. We developed a system of three-ring binders for telegrams, keeping track country by country, of all our instructions, discussions in New York, Washington and capitals. One of our USUN political officers (who normally was responsible for our UN relations with Eastern Europe) for the duration of the Chirep battle did virtually nothing but keep the telegrams in order.

Q: Because obviously you weren't going to get anywhere in Eastern Europe.

THAYER: Well, in any case, we co-opted him to do nothing but keep track of those damn books. And then we would lobby, maybe, at the ambassadorial level several countries a day and report to Washington, to the capital, what had been said by the permanent representative of that country in New York. This would be coordinated with what we were saying in Washington to the foreign ambassador and also coordinated with what instructions went out to the field for our ambassador to say to the host country foreign minister or prime minister on Chinese representation. So this was a tremendously complicated thing. And by the time we finished it, we had about a half a dozen or a dozen of these three-ring binder books just packed with telegrams.

I met every day for the last month of this lobbying effort, every evening, with the Japanese political counselor. We would sit together and compare notes on what we were doing. Because the Japanese were in this, they had committed themselves to the project, and they were lobbying very hard themselves on the part of this issue. For them it was domestically politically...

Q: I was going to ask, what was the drive on the Japanese side?

THAYER: Well, we sought their support. And, of course, their relationship with Taiwan was long standing and very close. The political leadership, the LDP, committed itself to going with us on this Chinese representation question. Therefore, in addition to their interest in the dual representation issue and doing their best to keep the faith in their relationship with Taiwan, the Japanese leadership couldn't afford as a domestic political matter to be on the

losing side on this issue. And particularly when you throw in the shock, to the Japanese, of the Kissinger visit to China.

Q: This happened when?

THAYER: In July. I forget the exact date. July 15th was the president's announcement from California that Kissinger had just returned from Peking. That had shaken the Japanese government pretty badly, and so they had a lot at stake in winning this dual representation battle, and, therefore, not only sought to coordinate with us but to make damn sure that they—including the diplomats in New York—made damn sure that they knew what the United States was doing. But also Tokyo was extremely hungry for information on what was happening and for reassurance that the U.S. wasn't dropping the ball or playing any more games or whatnot.

So nightly I met with the Japanese counselor, with whom I became very good friends, to exchange notes. He would tell me all the lobbying they did, and we would decide on what recommendations to give our respective capitals on who should be lobbied in third countries the next day and so forth.

Q: These interviews and the transcripts are really designed for people who are not overly familiar with how one works. When you say lobby, I mean, it's all very nice to talk to the ambassador or somebody at the United Nations, but one has said that countries don't have friends, they have interests. And on this China thing, I wouldn't imagine that words would have an awful lot of persuasion. I mean, but how did you operate?

THAYER: Well, we operated on the assumption that words do have some persuasive value, that the logical argument carries some weight. We also operated on the assumption that in the real world an argument made by the greatest power in the world has especially significant weight. Therefore, when we would tell a European country or a Third World country who valued the United States' friendship, they would listen with great care. When the United States says a vote in a certain way is of tremendous interest to the Americans,

it's not a small matter for another country to say no. So one of the factors in lobbying is logic. But there are other factors involved, too.

In fact, neither the Canadians nor the British, for example, joined us in this. They made clear early on they wouldn't join. But the Canadians, as I recall, didn't make it quite as clear as the U.K. I can remember shortly after my arrival, shortly after the dual representation proposal was floated, having a long talk with a Canadian officer trying to sell him on the logic of supporting us in this. But the lobbying in New York was done often by then Ambassador Bush; by Chris Phillips, who was his deputy; by Tap Bennett, who was number three; by Bill Schaufele, who was number four—they were all ambassadors—by Mike Newlin, who was political counselor; by myself; by others in various ways in New York. And I often would go out with one of the other ambassadors, and having given them a briefing paper which they soon mastered, because with slight changes for each country it was pretty well something they could draw on. And I would take notes and duly report it back, copies to our embassy in the capital and our other relevant embassies. This was the main activity of our mission to the U.N. for part of July and all of August, September, right through to the vote on October 24th.

Q: You say by two votes you missed this. Were there any votes you thought maybe could have been gotten? I mean, were there any crucial votes that didn't go our way?

THAYER: There were, I think, five votes that went differently than we had expected—I mean, differently against us than we had expected. There were other surprises the other way. (One of the things you do at the UN at vote time is to make sure the delegates are not hiding out in dark corners or not in the bathroom, that they're in their seats where they can commit themselves to the vote.)

There was some sentiment that we were “betrayed,” by those who changed to vote against us despite promises to the contrary. I was never comfortable with this posture of crying “betrayal”. I think we did pretty well, and if it hadn't been those five, it would

have been something else. History had caught up with us, and we lost the important question resolution by two votes. And having lost the important question resolution, which required that any vote on Chinese representation was a substantive issue and therefore require a two-thirds majority, having lost the important question procedural vote and everybody knowing that we didn't have a plurality for the substantive issue, the final vote was overwhelmingly for the admission of the PRC and the expulsion of the Republic of China (Taiwan).

The permanent representative of the Republic of China—in fact, the foreign minister was there. I guess the Republic of China foreign minister had the seat. He walked out before the final vote was taken once the important question resolution was defeated.

Q: Did you feel any sort of pressure from the China lobby, from Congress or anything that maybe this was the end of us and the UN, or had history caught up with that, too?

THAYER: There were some threats at that time. I don't remember the precise threats, but there were some in the Congress. There may have been a sense of Congress, a resolution of some kind, that if Taiwan got thrown out of the UN that the U.S. should stop paying its dues or something.

But the fact is that the Administration made a tremendous effort to win that vote, and nobody could have asked Ambassador Bush to have done more, with the exception that there were many who said that the timing of the Kissinger visit in the early summer of '71 undercut our position on the dual representation issue. There are many who said that the second Kissinger visit to Peking—Beijing, as we now call it—the announcement of which came just before the final vote in October, also undercut the impression of sincerity on the part of the Administration in pushing the dual representation issue. One might say that there's some validity to that argument.

Q: I was going to say, one of the accusations that has cropped up not only, obviously, in the press and all, but also in the interviews is that if Henry Kissinger is not the bride,

there's going to be no other wedding anywhere else. Did you have any feeling that once Kissinger—and obviously with Nixon, but Kissinger was very much a central figure in this—had moved to doing things with the PRC that the Republic of China, the Taiwan thing, had sort of dropped off the interest?

THAYER: Well, a lot of people were saying this. A lot of people whose votes we were soliciting were saying this. And, of course, the Japanese were upset, and the Taiwan group was upset because, on the face of it, it did give the impression of the United States being less than 100 percent behind supporting Taiwan. The fact is that the dual representation did embody letting the PRC in, did incorporate that. So it wasn't totally antithetical for Kissinger to make the trip at the time he did. Although, the second trip coming just before the final vote in the U.N., that timing was bad, but I'm not sure it was intentional. It may have been just sloppy.

Q: Were we making noises from the United Nations, or was this an operation that was happening sort of without much connection between our units?

THAYER: I think it's fair to say that we were not consulted closely! Certainly the U.N. wasn't consulted, and it was a surprise to Ambassador Bush. Kissinger's first visit to China was a surprise to the China desk. It was a surprise to everybody. I remember the night that Kissinger's first visit became news, I telephoned from my New York apartment to Bill Brown, now ambassador to Israel, who was then deputy director of the China desk, my old job, called Bill and asked him what the hell was going on. Bill's answer on the phone that night, “Harry, I don't know what's going on. It's news to us.” In fact, the Kissinger visit was presaged by many recommendations made by us on the China desk, even in my day, a year or two earlier. So its concept wasn't original. It was the timing.

I'm straying a little bit from your question, so bring me back.

Q: Well, it was really whether you felt that we did have basically a dual—I mean, not only a dual policy but an undercutting policy.

THAYER: I don't think that we were cynically trying to undercut the policy of dual representation. That has yet to be proved, that we were doing it cynically. It's quite conceivable to me, in our government, that we were so badly coordinated that when the Chinese and the U.S. side were negotiating the timing of Kissinger's second visit, it's quite possible that we failed to think through what the implications of the second visit, coming just before the China vote, would be.

Q: During particularly this period of the United Nations, George Bush was the ambassador. Is that right?

THAYER: Right.

Q: I wonder if you could give your impression of how he operated and impressions of the man, since he now, as we talk, is president of the United States.

THAYER: Well, being, naturally, a conservative Foreign Service officer, I won't say very much new about it. Incidentally, I also served as his deputy in Peking, so I maintained an admiration for him in both places. I think that in the UN, particularly on the Chinese representation issue, there was no question that Bush was convinced that this was the right thing to do. And I was there when Bush learned about the dual representation policy as had been proposed by Washington or there shortly after. I was in discussions with him about what the policy was. He became convinced that this was a good policy and one that he could put his heart into and his vigor into, which he did. He was indefatigable in lobbying for this policy. He believed in it. He made a lot of public speeches. He saw a lot of people, shook a lot of hands, entertained a lot of people, gave a lot of his time both at home and in the office to this. And his sincerity was never in doubt.

As an operator at the UN, he was very effective. In the first place, his credibility was very high. He made genuine friends with everybody, and he had a marvelous touch in dealing with the human beings behind the title, invited them out to his hometown, Greenwich, to seats at the baseball game, made personal connections with everybody. He's a good politician. But he also had a sincerity that went with this. People believed him. So when he said we, the United States, will do this or believe that and so forth, people believed him. When he asked to see somebody, people would see him. There weren't any groans that, “Here comes Big Foot Super Power banging on our door.” They received Bush as a human being they could relate to and who treated them with dignity and respect. And this counts a lot, particularly in multilateral diplomacy. It counts in all diplomacy, but it was very evident there.

Just to continue to answer your general question about the way he performed, my impressions, he was terrific on staff morale. He knew everybody. He wrote those little notes of appreciation for everything that was done. I remember when Mike Newlin and I negotiated in the Security Council context a hijacking agreement with the Chinese. This was the first agreement that we had negotiated in the UN with the PRC. Bush sent us down a little note, you know, “Congratulations for your great work on this.” That kind of little touch makes a lot of difference. But he was that way with the people he was relating to in the UN secretariat, the secretary general, the other missions. He was very friendly with the hostiles as well as our friends. I think people had a lot of respect for him.

Q: So what was the fallout? We lost this vote. You stayed in the UN until '74, is that right?

THAYER: I stayed in the UN until '75, actually. But the immediate fallout was that the PRC came in. And turning from working to exhaustion on the lobbying effort on behalf of Taiwan, immediately I became the Chinese specialist in New York who was on the spot to coordinate how we handled the new group coming in. And the first thing of importance that I handled was getting the new group in safely without being shot, otherwise crucified by bureaucrats or assassins, into the airport in La Guardia Airport and into New York. And

that was an enormous effort. You can imagine the desk was fully involved in it, getting clearances for a China Airlines plane to fly into La Guardia, pilots who had never made the trip, and all kinds of special deals that were worked out. And we had lots of meetings, I and the UN security guy, Joe Glennon, whose name I still remember, with the Port Authority, the Airport Authority, the local police, the state police, every conceivable bureaucratic entity gathered in huge rooms out at La Guardia Airport trying to coordinate every aspect of the flight clearance, the security, the motorcade, everything.

My responsibility was to represent the State Department and to report all this, acting on behalf of Ambassador Bush, whose instructions were, “Do it. Do it right. We're going to welcome these people. They're members of the UN. We're going to deal with them.” He was immediately on board with that. But also reporting to Washington—we used the phone a lot to Washington—making sure that Washington's various diplomatic interests were being preserved. I mean, I was not making policy; I was simply trying to make sure that everything went smoothly. And the desk, two or three days before Deng arrived, sent up one of their officers to be sure that Washington's interests were fully represented there. He was Phil Lincoln, who is now consul general in Sydney, a Chinese language officer, an able officer.

In any event, we worked hard to get the Chinese in smoothly. They bought a hotel—I forget what the name of the hotel was—for their permanent representation in New York. We did our best to deal with them effectively from the start.

Q: Were you making contact with them all the time?

THAYER: Yes. After they arrived, I was the contact guy. And I went over to their mission quite a bit. The Chinese sent a very strong delegation. Their “Permrep,” head of mission, was Huang Hua, who eventually was foreign minister, but very early on—in the revolutionary period—was an America specialist. We bent over backwards to be hospitable. We were the host country, and Bush took this very seriously, made sure that all

entities of both the local government and the federal government were doing their best to make our new guests comfortable.

Q: Were there any problems from the fact that we didn't recognize them? I mean, that just really wasn't a factor then?

THAYER: No, it was not a factor. In the multilateral context we dealt with them. We didn't deal with them on bilateral issues except those having to do with their UN presence. But it was not an inhibition at all. The main thing that distinguished our dealings with the Chinese was that they were a sexy new commodity, and there was tremendous interest in Washington, including by the secretary and the president, that the thing be done right. And so there was a lot of pressure on all of us to make sure it was done right. But we all agreed that it ought to be done right, so it was.

Just to add this one tiny illustration, there were hostile acts against the permanent mission. One day a mixture of Caucasians and Chinese—I guess Chinese-Americans and ROC citizens—threw rotten eggs against the wall of the Chinese mission. Well, the Chinese mission got appropriately outraged about that, and as soon as Ambassador Bush learned about it, he gave me a message for the Chinese. (I had called him from home to tell him this had happened; it was a Sunday, I think, and I had been informed by our security office.) Bush gave me a message for the Chinese. I immediately went down to the PRC mission and asked to see the Deputy Permrep or whoever and extended the ambassador's personal and the US's national apologies that such an insulting thing had happened to our guests. It was just part of the game.

Q: You saw the PRC delegates right from the beginning. Did they feel they were in a hostile country? What was their reaction when they came? A generation had been brought up as we were the great Satan, to use present Arabic terminology.

THAYER: Well, referring back to my conversation with Ambassador Bohlen in Hong Kong in '57 or '58, they came in not hostile, not taking a hostile position. I can't say what was

in their minds, but I can tell you what their posture was. Their posture was learning, and they were very cautious and prudent when they came in. They were, I think, unprepared to win the UN vote that year, and so they weren't completely up to snuff, and they were in a learning posture the first year or two that I was there. If I can recall correctly, in early 1972 at the end of the 1971 General Assembly session—a couple of months after the Chinese came in—we did a wrap-up on their performance. I remember using the metaphor that the Chinese did not, as many people expected, come in breaking up the furniture in the UN. Far from it. They came in very quietly, very politely, very much asking questions and hearing the answers, taking notes and acting upon them. So they were not a hostile presence from our point of view. They were not a pain for us. They were learning.

Q: Where were they learning? In other words, obviously, they were not in a position to turn to their old mentors, the Soviets, to say, "Well, how should we act on this?" I'm not talking about on substantive things, but I mean organizational things like that.

THAYER: Well, they leaned very heavily on the secretariat, and they moved, in due course, to see that some of the more pro-Taiwan elements in the secretariat were replaced by some of their own people, part of the game. They drew heavily on the non-aligned who had supported them and they could ask advice from. But they also drew heavily on our expertise, and if they wanted a briefing—I can't remember specifics—but if they wanted a briefing on the history of this or that issue or the legal ramifications of this or that issue, they would go to the legal advisor of the UN, but they might also pick the brains of our very excellent legal advisors in New York.

There were other issues on which we were in different camps. One of them was the Korea question. And another big issue we had during my time was the Cambodia question. On those questions, the Chinese were on the other side, to begin with, anyhow, and they wouldn't come to us for any advice about these, but they were going to their like-minded friends and asking, "How does this work? What is the history of it?" This kind of thing.

Q: Did you get any feel for Huang Hua while he was there and how he operated and how he viewed things?

THAYER: Well, certainly how he operated. He operated in a low-key, polite way. He's a very complicated guy, and I don't claim to have ever understood Huang Hua. He has a long, well-documented involvement in U.S.-PRC relations. He's a student of Leighton Stewart, who used to be head of the university in China and was our ambassador. Huang was quite capable, though, of being outraged at the United States.

Q: We have some interviews. He gave a very difficult time down in Shanghai in 1948, very hard-nosed.

THAYER: Well, he's quite capable of being hard-nosed. On such issues as Cambodia where our position was very strongly opposite to the Chinese position, the Chinese were quite capable — and Huang Hua, personally — of attacking us vociferously, even nastily. But his posture toward us generally was quite friendly. And I remember, for example, when the Chinese foreign minister, Chiao Kuanhua, who lost his job at the time the Gang of Four fell, when the foreign minister came to New York for the opening of General Assembly one year, Ambassador Bush invited Chiao and Huang Hua and a couple of their officers out to Bush's mother's place in Greenwich, and they all went out there. And Huang just couldn't have been more affable on that occasion. His relations with Bush were very good. There was a younger female officer at the UN at our mission who spoke some Chinese, and he took an interest from day one encouraging her to speak Chinese with him, and he had that kindly touch. But in the end, I think we felt that he was more of a creature of his mission than a heavyweight politician in his own right.

Q: You were there until '75. Who replaced Bush? When did Bush leave?

THAYER: Bush left in 1972 for the Republican National Committee, John Scali replaced him. John was a former ABC correspondent. He was on the Nixon White House staff, and he came up, his first entry into diplomacy, following Bush.

Q: How did he operate?

THAYER: Well, he is not the instinctive politician that Bush was, and he also felt, I think, a great deal more hostile pressure from the non-aligned than Bush had. For both him and his successor, Moynihan, I think, our issues with the non-aligned, both economic and political, intruded more into their consciousness and psyches than they had in the case of Bush. Scali was very much involved, though, in all the political issues, and there were some rough ones when he was there.

Q: You were there when Moynihan was there, too, is that right?

THAYER: No. No, I'd left before Moynihan came.

Q: In your particular field as sort of the China man, were there any major issues that you dealt with, say, while you were at the UN?

THAYER: Well, more in the capacity as the Asia person. It's an important distinction because there weren't many China problems in the UN. There were, however, the Korean issue—the perennial Korean issue was with us—the Cambodia issue for two years was there then Sihanouk was in Peking and the Lon Nol regime in power in Cambodia. We were supporting the Lon Nol government. There was very heavy lobbying on the Cambodian issue, where we were at loggerheads with the Chinese. On Vietnam, I remember accompanying Bush to see Waldheim on instructions to explain why we were mining the harbors of Hanoi.

We were involved with the Chinese on a variety of Security Council issues. Shortly after the PRC came in, the India- Pakistan war of '71 consumed the Security Council, and

that was a major issue there. There were similar things that went on during the Scali years. But there were not Chinese issues in the UN so much. For example, one of the big issues, I guess, was during the Scali period—or maybe it was still in the Bush period—was the reduction of our contribution to the UN from 33 percent to 25 percent. Well, it doesn't sound like much of an issue now, but that was a major issue. And former Senator Gale McGee, who was part of our delegation that year, handled that issue in the financial committee. But I think the Chinese were supportive of us in reducing our contribution, having expenses more shared by others. The Chinese, like the Soviets, were also, as I recall, quite conservative financially with the UN and didn't want to see some of the non-aligned ideas resulting in the UN undertaking expenditures that weren't appropriate.

Q: In a way, I would have thought that there would have been almost a sigh of relief after twenty-odd years of fighting the China issue, which was the representation of China, to have that over with. Was there almost a feeling, "Okay, now we can get on with other business"? Because that must have permeated everything.

THAYER: Yes, I think there was that psychology. I mean, you get caught up in lobbying for the Chinese representation issue and policy is right and so forth. But all of us knew that inevitability the U.S. had to find some relationship to the PRC, some way to deal with the PRC. And the PRC entry into the UN, for all the anomaly it helped contribute to in Taiwan's status, it had the effect of a catharsis. It opened up the possibilities—as the Kissinger visit did, too—of a more normal relationship. So, in that way, it was quite as you describe it.

Q: How about with the United Nations? What was your relationship to both the NSC and later? I don't know if Kissinger was secretary of state or not, but was there much interest on the part of Henry Kissinger with the UN, or did you feel this in direction or pressure or competition?

THAYER: Yes. I kept up direct ties with the NSC staff, and this was partly at the initiative of the NSC staff. But it was partly my own initiative, as a way, for my part, to ensure that

what we were doing was not eventually going to run into problems with the NSC. So I was in direct touch with various NSC staffers during that period, and their interest, of course, reflected Henry Kissinger's interest during his NSC tenure.

When we did have one problem with the PRC—we had more than one problem—and it's one I can't go into here, but just to say that at Ambassador's Bush's request, as a result partly of my own proposal, I went down to the NSC to see Winston Lord to brief him directly on behalf of Bush about an issue that had come up. It involved host country relations and the running of their mission. This was because anything that happened with China was of direct interest to Henry Kissinger and in this case was quite a sensitive thing. Bush wanted to be sure that the national security advisor had the full facts.

But we—at least, I—didn't then get caught up in any battle between the NSC and the State Department. My contacts were mostly a matter of coordination among the bureaucratic entities that needed to be informed. Later, when I was Chinese affairs director, 1975-79, NSC-State battles were a daily problem for me.

Q: You didn't have the feeling that the NSC was undercutting the UN mission to pursue whatever their policy might be or anything like that?

THAYER: No, I did not. There were issues where there was a lot of contention between a number of elements including the NSC. I was not so conscious of those as I'm sure that Ambassadors Bush or Scali were. And I can remember feelings of outrage about what NSC was doing on some issue or other, but I can't remember what the issues were. I mean, I just can tell you it was there.

Q: Well, why don't we cut it off here.

THAYER: Okay.—

Q: You wanted to make an addendum to your interest in the Foreign Service, because of your connection with Jack Downey.

THAYER: I had mentioned in our earlier discussions, too, that the Chinese announcement that Jack Downey had been captured had a big impact on me. That happened while I was working for the Philadelphia Bulletin, and it was an added incentive for me to go into the Foreign Service and to focus on China. Jack was a CIA operator who had reportedly been captured when the small plane he was on landed in Manchuria. In any event, that Chinese announcement, which I read in the New York Times, did have a big impact on me, as I mentioned in the earlier conversation.

Subsequently, when I went to Hong Kong, where I served from '57 to '59, my friendship at Yale with Jack—not an intimate one, but still a friendship—was known in the consulate. When his mother and brother, Bill, came out for a historic first visit to Jack in 1957 or '58, I was assigned as their control officer and was able, in the small ways that one does, to help Jack's mother and Jack's younger brother through the problems of Hong Kong and the transit to China, as well as seeing them on their way out and so forth. That meant a lot to me in a small way, contributing to my sense of not only supporting Jack but also being a part of what was going on.

That sense of being a part is also in the context of another facet of my background, having worked for Newsweek for a couple of years—'52 to '54—I did most of the cover story which appeared in the Newsweek medical section, actually, on the twenty-one prisoners of war who “stayed behind.” They were those prisoners of war from the Korean War who chose to stay in Korea or China instead of being repatriated at the end of the war. I went to the homes of many of these prisoners of war— and received correspondents' reports on others—and tried to investigate their backgrounds, what kind of people they were, and so forth. As reflected in the POW story, most of these people who chose to stay behind had,

not surprisingly, come from troubled homes and had other reasons to be not enthusiastic about returning to their former lives in the States.

But, again; that story was another link for me with China. And then Jack's imprisonment and helping his family coming through Hong Kong was another aspect of that. A further aspect was when I was deputy head of the China desk, '68 to '70, we then, as always, wrote the instructions for the bilateral ambassadorial talks between the American and Chinese ambassadors in Warsaw, our only official channel of communication for many years with the Chinese. In those talks we never failed to raise the question of the release of the remaining American prisoners, including Jack.

Q: Did you find that you were pushing it? Were you giving a little more impetus to making sure that it was included every time?

THAYER: I can honestly say that I did not. But the reason I did not was because the release of American prisoners had always been high on our agenda in Geneva and Warsaw and remained high on our agenda in Warsaw, and it took no extra push for me to have it stay high on the agenda. But it gave me extra satisfaction every time I participated in instructions that were drafted for those meetings where we pushed for the release of prisoners. So those are the aspects of the Downey case I wanted to follow up on.

Q: You left the UN, or getting ready to leave it, towards the end of '74. Your next assignment was to Beijing as deputy chief of mission. But I wonder if you could tell us how that job came about, because I'm sure it's a very competitive one.

THAYER: I guess the topic sentence really was because I had worked with [George] Bush on Chinese affairs when I was in the UN—as we've covered in earlier conversations. But also being a good professional, I sought that job through normal State Department channels. In fact, what happened was when Bush was named by [Gerald] Ford as the envoy to Beijing to replace David Bruce—and Bush was then head of the Republican National Committee—I called Bush's special assistant, Tom Lias, since dead, whom I

knew quite well. I didn't want to bother Ambassador Bush directly about this, but I called Tom and simply told Tom that I wanted him to know that I was applying through State Department channels to go to Beijing in any capacity, and since Ambassador Bush was going to Beijing, I wanted him to be aware of that. I told Tom that I didn't expect Ambassador Bush necessarily to do anything about it, but I wanted to be sure that he was aware of it.

I applied through the State Department, let it be known in the ways you do, that you're interested in a job. I also telephoned PRC affairs director Oscar Armstrong from New York to inform Oscar, with whom I worked a lot, that I had informed Ambassador Bush that I would like to go to Beijing, that I was doing nothing more about it through Ambassador Bush, but that I wanted Oscar to be aware of what I had done. I had told the State Department I was ready to go out to Beijing in any capacity. I had said that pretty much right along, and in any cone doing anything. I actually expected, if I did get chosen to go, it would be as political chief, chief of the political section.

I learned of my assignment some weeks later, sometime in 1974 before George Bush went out to Beijing. He came up from Washington to New York to a farewell party given by then PermRep John Scali, to which I was invited, a send-off party. Bush took me aside just at the beginning of this dinner in the U.N. PermRep's Waldorf apartment to tell me, “Well, Harry, it's all set. You're going to replace John Holdridge as soon as John finishes his tour.” John was DCM, and I had really not expected to be DCM. I was kind of dumbfounded by this, but obviously thrilled. And the prospect of going out to Beijing, in the first place, was, for me, terrific. Second place, going out, working with Bush, whom I liked very much, and third place, going out as the top professional in China. I never had really expected to get to China. Going out in that capacity was a prospect that I was really eager about. So that's the background of that.

Q: You got out there when?

THAYER: I arrived in May of 1975.

Q: This was, of course, a rather difficult time as far as American foreign policy is concerned because this is just when we had pulled out of Vietnam in a pretty inglorious manner. Did this impact at all on how we were dealing with the Chinese, or was this considered, in a way, an opportunity? How did you view it from your particular working viewpoint?

THAYER: Well, really, in all honesty, it was a very quiet time in U.S.-PRC relations, and I did not make any dramatic contribution to those relations that I'm aware of. I think that Ambassador Bush would, in all honesty, say the same thing, because the relationship was really quite cool; what we were trying to do was to keep the ship—the ship of bilateral relations—from rocking too much.

It was the Gang of Four period. Relations, trade, everything else had cooled from the high points of the rising curve of '72 and '73 and the first part of '74. By the time I got there in '75, the relationship was on a downward curve or had flattened at a low level, however you want to look at it. Our contacts were limited. We did a fair amount of travel, but travel was limited, nevertheless. And the relationship was correct. We had some cancellations of cultural exchanges because of supposed impolitic statements on one side or another, trivial things that the Chinese chose to use to eliminate certain contacts. It was really a cool period. But we, nevertheless, had quite a few dealings with the Chinese, if for no other reason because there were a fair number of visitors, both official and unofficial. There were such things as unofficial visitors, but except for those promoted by the Sino-U.S. Friendship Association, we came in contact with most of them. Most of them sought us out. The Friendship Association visitors did not.

Bush's relations were very good with the Chinese. I think there were good vibes left over from his New York service, where he, as we talked about earlier, was the leading host for the Chinese coming to New York. His personal relationships were quite good, and

they always treated Bush politely and respectfully. Bush's man-in-the-street reputation in Peking was quite good, mostly derived in my encounters with taxi drivers or shop clerks who would volunteer nice things to me about Bush. So we had our contacts with the foreign ministry, and we attended banquets with visitors. Two high points of my service as DCM out there were the visits of Henry Kissinger in October of 1975 and of President Ford in December.

Q: He was then secretary of state.

THAYER: Then secretary of state. And then that was followed by the visit of President Ford in December of 1975, two months later. Those were really quite important events during the first half of my tour in Beijing.

Q: You say they were important times. Was it protocol-wise, or was this a lot of work, or were things changed at all?

THAYER: Kissinger had regularly visited China since '71, and he had not visited at all in '75 because relations were fairly cool. In a situation where symbols are in some ways the substance of the relationship, a visit by the secretary of state to Beijing was an important event in itself and said something about the relationship. It said that the relationship was continuing, and that, in itself, in the strategic world of the time, was an important fact. Even though trade was down, cultural exchanges were down and so forth, the fact that the secretary of state was visiting Peking was very important. But there were various issues to be settled that weren't settled by the Kissinger visit or, for that matter, by the president's visit, because the Chinese were so tangled up in their own domestic problems, among other reasons, that it was very hard for them to make any decision that was favorable to the relationship.

Q: This is still when they were trying to sort out the post- Mao period, wasn't it?

THAYER: Well, this was before Mao's death, but the Gang of Four was riding high. Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wen Yuan, Jiang Qing were all in prominence. So President Ford's visit was also an important symbolic event at the time. That helped balance off his earlier meeting in Vladivostok with the Soviets. So Ford's visit to China was important in itself. The symbolism of the presidential visit was significant. But there were no great advances substantively that came out of that visit. Then Bush himself left China almost immediately after the Ford visit. He left on December 7, 1975, I think, to go back and run the CIA.

Q: Let's talk a little about Bush. After all, we're talking about the man who is now president of the United States. But it does seem like there was a criticism during the campaign when he was first running for president which was essentially that he was "Mr. R#sum#." He'd been the ambassador at the UN, and then he'd been with the Republican National Committee, and he was ambassador, really, for a very short time. Did you have the feeling that he was somebody sort of passing through and looking at it, but not taking control? How did you feel?

THAYER: Well, to be explicit, no, Stu. I had the impression of somebody who took the job very seriously. I can illustrate that in various ways. But just to pick two ways: when I was still at the UN, Bush came back for consultation, back to Washington, and he got some kind of a bug. He had come back through Pakistan, he got a bug there, so he was hospitalized in Georgetown Hospital. And he asked me to come down from New York to see him, or it was arranged that I would come down from New York to see him. I remember very clearly Bush, in his hospital bed recovering at Georgetown, his telling me that he was eager to have me come out. He said all the nice things. But then he said, "I really feel that we've got to work harder to get to know these Chinese leaders, and we don't know enough about this group who now seem to be making decisions. Specifically, I'm determined to have a meeting with Zhang Chunqiao. Nobody's met him. We don't know enough about him, and I want to do something about it." He said nice things about John Holdridge's work. He didn't mean there was any change when I was coming, but he just

was indicating his anxiousness to understand more about what was going on in China. That was one illustration.

Another illustration was that he really worked hard on his spoken Chinese language when he was there. He took lessons virtually every day from our resident Chinese teacher, Mrs. Tang, who was, of course, assigned by the Diplomatic Services Bureau to teach us all Chinese. But Ambassador Bush worked hard at the language, and he used it. He's one of these people, unlike most introverted Foreign Service political officers, he didn't mind making a mistake in the spoken language. So he practiced his Chinese every chance he'd get, but he studied it also.

Well, these are not the marks of somebody who was just passing through. He traveled in China. When he traveled, he learned. He took notes. He took notes in his own hands. When he attended meetings he took notes, and he would come back and faithfully, much to our gratitude, report to the staff. Normally, of course, at official meetings he would have somebody accompany him, very often myself. But when he had conversations that somebody else attended, he would make notes of these conversations, and he would pass them around among the staff.

Q: What was the position of Zhang Chunqiao?

THAYER: I think he was a vice premier.

Q: But he was part of the Gang of Four?

THAYER: Yes.

Q: Were you able to get him there?

THAYER: Never did. Although he appeared for athletic and other events, and we could see him lined up like you see the Russian leaders lined up. But, no, we had no contact. But Bush was very persistent in inviting people to the residence, and he did get everybody

he could get to the residence, perhaps for just a small supper. He'd always take care to include myself and one or two others, for example. Bill Thomas, who was then chief of the econ section, or Stan Brooks, political chief.

I remember a fascinating evening at the residence one night when Bush invited the then-head of the Chinese Association for Friendship with Foreign Peoples—whose name will come back to me—but he also had been the Chinese ambassador at Warsaw, our chief interlocutor for many years. He had been Zhou En-lai's man at the time that Chiang Kai-shek was captured at Xian in the '30s. And it was marvelous fun for a bunch of China specialists to sit around hearing one of the prime players in the Xian incident describe at first hand everything that happened.

Well, that wasn't getting at the key power structure. This guy was on the edge. But it was the kind of thing that Bush did a lot of. Deng Xiaoping liked Bush, and he gave a farewell lunch for Bush. In the charming way the Chinese have, they gave the lunch in the “Taiwan Room” of the Great Hall of the People. But this was, nevertheless, a very warm send-off that Deng gave to the ambassador. The Chinese did have a certain respect for Bush, I think partly because he wasn't hesitant to speak out firmly to the Chinese, too. He wasn't a patsy for the Chinese.

I was going to illustrate this in a very modest way by recalling an episode involving one of our officers from Hong Kong, whose wife, I think, was of Vietnam-Chinese origin. They had both come to Beijing, visiting there for a few days. The wife came to the front gate of the liaison office compound to visit the office, as any Foreign Service wife would do, and showed her American passport to the Chinese Army (PLA) gate guard. But because she had an Oriental face—the Chinese have a very hard time thinking of Americans as anything but white-faced Anglo-Saxons—the guard refused to let her in. She insisted, and the guard continued to refuse. One of our officers went out and checked into the problem. Then the consular officer went out and argued with the guard that this woman had a right to come into the embassy. And, again, the Chinese refused.

Ambassador Bush heard about this, and Bush was clearly outraged by the idea that the Chinese would have the gall to prevent an American citizen from coming into the American liaison officer compound to say nothing of an American diplomat. Bush hit the roof. He was really furious. We discussed what to do about it and decided that we would, in the next stage of this battling, have an officer go out and talk to the PLA guard, insist he make a call to his superiors. That didn't work. Then he decided to unleash the political counselor, who was Stan Brooks, to call the equivalent of the assistant secretary for American affairs, a guy by the name of Ling. Stan is tough and hard-nosed, among the more stubborn of our colleagues. Stan called and, in Bush's name, just raised holy hell about the guard's performance, the principles involved and so forth. The result was that the woman was let into our compound within about thirty seconds.

But the point to be made here was about Bush, who was often accused of not being able to stand up for himself, being a wimp or so forth, this kind of thing. His genuine outrage really came through, and he was prepared to pull out all the stops and be as hard as necessary. He would have gone much further if necessary to support this principle that the Chinese were not going to interfere with American diplomats or, for that matter, with Americans.

We learned later of a humorous denouement of that episode. As I recall, a senior Chinese representative in Washington visited the White House a day or two later He was to meet his wife separately at the White House. For some reason, the guard initially refused to let the wife of the representative into the White House. We understood at the time the Chinese were convinced that this was a swift American retaliation for the episode at our gate in Beijing.

Q: And you just kept your mouth shut.

THAYER: We kept our mouth shut, because, as we all know, the American government has never been able to be this responsive. [Laughter] But this episode was also

considered important enough and Bush's remonstrations were effective enough so that I think Deng Xiaoping also apologized to President Ford when he came out to visit, apologized for having kept this person out.

Q: While we're talking about relations between the two countries, as a China specialist, did you find it was a problem, not just in the official but the non-official relations between the two countries? There seems to be an infatuation by Americans with China, and I'm wondering whether you found that this infatuation led to what infatuations do, sometimes not asking for as much or expecting as much as we might from other countries. Did you find this sort of a problem in our relations?

THAYER: I think it became later in the overall U.S.- China relationship. This takes us ahead to the period after I left Beijing, after the death of Mao. (Mao died in '76.)

Incidentally, between Bush's departure and the arrival of [Thomas] Gates six months later, I was charg# in Beijing, and as a China specialist, one of the rewarding things was to be the man in charge carrying the American flag in China, where I was never sure, for the first 20 years of my career, I would get to. As our relationship began to pick up during the Carter presidency, which was coincidental with the post-Mao period, there began, as you will recall—it didn't begin, perhaps, but there was an acceleration of “China euphoria.” Bloomingdale's had its China-style furniture and its China days, and China was really a sexy item in the United States. As we moved toward normalization—this is a time now I was country director for China between about September 1, 1976 through the normalization period to the summer of '79—there began to be, partly by accident, partly nurtured by the Carter administration, a feeding of the American tendency to display a special emotion toward China. This was most illustrated, in my judgment, during the visit of Deng to the United States. In a gala at the Kennedy Center, Deng came onto the stage and greeted a bunch of small children who had just done a dance of some kind. Shirley MacLaine got up and made an absolutely inane speech about what a great people the

Chinese were, and she also had the ignorance to say what a terrific thing the cultural revolution was, as I recall.

In any event, there was this euphoria about Chinese. American business was crawling all over each other to get a piece of the China action, and I felt at the time that the administration was overselling China to the American public. It was important that we help contribute to an atmosphere of increased warmth in the relationship in order to bring both sides of the normalization equation up to the point of willingness to regularize the relationship. But China was oversold in 1978-79, just as we had oversold Chiang Kai-shek in World War II. Americans were especially upset by Chiang Kai-shek's corruption and so forth, because they expected something different. Americans were offended by the fact that in the post-'79 period, as the '80s moved along and then climaxed by the Tiananmen massacre, the Chinese turned out not to be saints and perfect partners after all. This is a longstanding problem in the relationship.

Not to digress too much, but to pick up on your question, I've always felt that part of our problem with dealing with the post-war period and the Chinese civil war was that we had so oversold Chiang Kai-shek in World War II. President Roosevelt insisted, perhaps for good reasons at the time, that Chiang and his country hold one of the permanent seats in the Security Council. We treated the Chinese as a major power. It wasn't just Henry Luce; it was a lot of other people, in the government and out, who sold Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT as the greatest thing that ever happened to democracy in China, etc., and we oversold them. So when Chiang Kai-shek turned out to be something less than we had sold ourselves on his being, we overreacted in bitterness and anger at and derision of Chiang Kai-shek. In the same way, we oversold ourselves about the promise of the U.S.-China relationship in the period of the '70s and the '80s. We're seeing the fruit of that now in the reaction to Tiananmen.

Q: What would you do as charg# to a country where you say our relations were not really moving in any direction? What does a charg# do with a major country such as China?

THAYER: Well, that's a very good question. Compared to being a charg# in a normal relationship, the charg#'s work is not heavy in Beijing. But, there were a lot of things to do. There were, of course, visiting delegations to be supported.

Q: Visitors, I assume, were a terrible burden, weren't they?

THAYER: I wouldn't call them a terrible burden, but they were very much a part of our work. We also had Americans who were working at fertilizer factories and others that needed protection, welfare. There were various consular problems. We had the cultural exchange going on. We had occasional complaints of a political nature that had to be dealt with. We had the endless negotiations you had for high-level visits. There was kind of a routine external, but not every active external activities. But you did travel and you reported on factories you'd visit, call on the party stalwarts, call on other prominent people in various cities, report that. The demonstrations at Zhou En-lai's death took place when I was charg#, an exciting time.

There was a lot of content analysis. The People's Daily and other press was read every day by all of us who had the language. We also had agriculture and commercial reporting to do, the kind of routine things that are done in any embassy. We had a very small staff. So considering the size of our staff, we had enough to do. But there was in Beijing, like you read about in the stories of China in the time of the boxer period or all through the '20s and '30s, an awful lot of back-scratching among the foreign diplomatic corps, the endless dinners by the various chiefs of mission for the various other chiefs of mission. And when a foreign ambassador left, there were endless farewell parties. There were endless arrival parties. And they were a real pain, too. It meant that almost every night was tied up socially because you really had to show the flag, have friendly relations with third-country counterparts. But that was a really down side of the job, as far as I was concerned.

Also, national days. Everybody had a formal national day celebration. (The Americans, because we did not have a normal relationship, had two celebrations, one to which

Chinese officials only came; another for everybody else.) But the national days were, in practice, one hour long. They normally lasted from 5:00 to 6:00 or 6:00 to 7:00, and they normally were in the International Club. They normally served the same liquor—I won't say out of the same bottles, but they served the same liquor, had the same glasses, the same hors d'oeuvres, the same often unpleasant waiters and waitresses passing things around, and the same people to talk to. When Bush was there, incidentally, we often went to these national days on our bicycle. At least that was one activity. We spent a lot of time bicycling around Beijing on weekends.

But the best about being charg# for me in Beijing was running my own post for six months, carrying the flag, and working with a bunch of very high-quality FSO professional China specialists. Having that team work together was a great joy for me.

One other thing I did while I was charg# was to greet former President [Richard M.] Nixon on his first foreign foray after his resignation. You may recall that the Chinese invited Nixon to come to Beijing in the middle of the 1976 New Hampshire primary, and there was a good deal of speculation in the American press at the time that somehow the Chinese were trying to interfere with that primary, where Ford, among others, was on the ballot. The fine tuning of the U.S.-China relationship required even finer tuning then when the decision about meeting Nixon came. Should the charg# of the liaison office go to the airport to greet a disgraced president, as normally was done to greet a high-level person? This was kind of a hot potato at the time.

Q: I assume you went.

THAYER: I went. When I went out to the airport to meet Nixon, standing around with the Chinese at the time waiting for his special plane to come in, the chief of protocol asked me to come over and meet under the wing of some aircraft on the tarmac. Hua Guofeng, who was then an obscure guy with a security background, who became the next powerhouse in the Chinese government. But that was the first sign. When Nixon came, Hua came out to

meet him, and that was the first sign that Hua's star was on the rise. It didn't stay up past 1980.

Q: What was your analysis of this? Was this too much of a hot potato even to consider about the invitation by the Chinese to Nixon?

THAYER: It was a hot potato at the time because of its domestic political sensitivities. I felt the Chinese were not just trying to embarrass the Americans. I think Chinese motivations in inviting Nixon were twofold, basically. First, they really do make a big point of being true to their old friends, and they consider Nixon an old friend. But there was a political point to be made, too. And that is that the relationship after Nixon left the presidency (starting before Nixon left, in fact) was not moving forward as well as the Chinese perhaps had hoped. So it was a way of sending a message to the Americans: “We're inviting Nixon to symbolize what a good guy he was in beginning the process of normalization, and you guys who are now in charge in Washington aren't doing as well as our friend Richard Nixon.” The Nixon visit, incidentally, was preceded by a visit of his daughter, I think Tricia Nixon, and her visit was given front-page play in the People's Daily.

I might mention one quick little thing to give the flavor of life in Beijing at the time. I got a call at about one o'clock in the morning from the foreign ministry protocol office saying that they wanted me to know that Tricia Nixon and her husband were arriving the next morning at the Beijing Airport at seven or eight o'clock, whatever it was. They assumed, they said, that I'd want to know so I could be there. Well, the fact is that the way we had to operate in Beijing was that our drivers were completely under the control of the Public Service Bureau. I had absolutely no way of contacting my driver in the middle of the night, and there was no way that I was going to get out to the airport unless I took a taxi. And the Chinese knew this. So I had to tell my Chinese telephone caller that I was regrettably going to be unable to make it to the airport to greet Tricia Nixon.

When former President Nixon came, I was included in the arrival and the farewell banquets for Nixon. I told his principal assistant—and I mentioned to the former president also—that he was welcome to come to the liaison office to see the brick and mortar fruits of his original opening to China. But I said that I hoped that he would understand that, while I would like to welcome him to the liaison office, it would have to be without any publicity when he came. Nixon did not come to the liaison office, but at the farewell at the airport he went out of his way to thank me for the invitation. It was an awkward situation at that time.

Q: Nixon, at that point, was not what you'd call rehabilitated or anything like that.

THAYER: That's right. Nixon was really a bad name in the States. It was in the middle of political happenings in the States having to do with the next election, and it was a very sensitive time.

Q: How were we reading what was happening in China? I'm talking about the political leadership. How did you go about it, and where did you see things going? This was a time of change. Mao died while you were there, didn't he?

THAYER: Mao died, I think, in November '76.

Q: He was pretty much out of it, wasn't it?

THAYER: Well, he was out of it, but he was still there. The Gang of Four was riding high during most of the time I was there. There were the riots or demonstrations at Tiananmen and at the Martyr's Shrine subsequent to Zhou En-lai's death in April of 1976. People were going up and people were going down, but most of this was obscure to us. I mean, there was some very esoteric tea leaf reading done by our analysts who were very good, particularly Stan Brooks and Lynn Pasco. Lynn is now DCM in Beijing to Jim Willey. (Stan subsequently went to Taipei as AIT director.) We saw China leadership in flux, and there was not much we could do about it. This was manifested to us in various ways in

trying to get progress on the claims assets issue and trying to get certain cultural visits accomplished, certain other things.

The Chinese were just themselves tied in knots. How we discerned this was the way people would speak to us, the jargon they would use in briefings, toasts, what was printed in People's Daily and in other publications. But we didn't really understand a lot that was going on very deeply behind the scenes.

Q: Henry Kissinger was secretary of state while you were there. Did you have the feeling that, having broken through to China, his focus of interest was really more on the Soviet Union now?

THAYER: No, I did not have that feeling. But the fact was that Kissinger, as secretary of state, was trying to keep the relationship with China moving, but it was hard to move forward at that time. It was just a period in history when progress was not going to be made.

Q: Were there any other developments at that time, or should we move on to your next assignment?

THAYER: Well, there were a lot of developments, but I guess we ought to move along.

Q: How about Thomas Gates? What was his background, and did he make any changes?

THAYER: Gates made no change in the basic policy. There was no change to be made. Gates was selected after a long delay. He was a secretary of the Navy, and then secretary of defense under Eisenhower. He was chairman and CEO of Morgan Bank in New York. Also from Philadelphia, in fact. Our families had known each other before. He was selected, I think, because, among other things, Ford had confidence in him, he was a non-controversial “political figure;” that is, a non- professional. We wanted to have a political

figure for symbolic purposes in China. Gates, of course, had government experience and prestige, but he didn't have any background in China.

He did not make changes when he got there, but he worked very hard at learning and getting around as best he could. He just carried on the relationship on a more or less even keel for the rest of the Ford administration. Very dramatically, the Tangshan earthquake happened when he was there, when there was something like 200,000 people killed, and virtually the whole liaison office staff moved into the Residence out of the hotels and apartment houses and so forth. Gates did a great job in keeping the U.S. operation on an even keel at that period.

But, no, things didn't change much. They didn't really start to change until the Carter administration, and that was partly because the situation in China changed then. A leadership came into place with the demise of the Gang of Four, the death of Mao, the rise of Deng Xiaoping and others who saw the value of an improving Sino-U.S. relationship. With a new U.S. administration in place the relationship then began to move forward.

Q: It's been mentioned in some of these interviews that really it wasn't a matter of the United States doing something early on that really would have opened up things; it was a matter of events in China, the cultural revolution, the Great Leap Forward, etc., etc., all of which would have precluded any real opening. Is this your feeling that political paces in China really govern a lot of things?

THAYER: That is very substantially true. There may have been things that we could have done in 1949 that would have made a difference, '48 and '49. There may have been things that we could have done in the mid-'50s that would have made a difference. But basically the Chinese were not fully prepared, even at the time before the Korean War, to enter into a relationship with us. In the '50s certainly there was some lack of enthusiasm for relations with the Chinese under the Dulles administration, but the Chinese were not behaving very well either toward the United States.

In the '60s under [John F.] Kennedy, we made very direct, explicit efforts to improve relations, and the Chinese were simply not prepared to go forward for some of the reasons that you cited. So it was really not until the late '60s, when the Chinese were prepared, that we also had moved along to that point. Nixon became president. So the time was right for the relationship to begin its movement, and that was also because things had changed in China. The context of Sino-U.S. relations had changed, and we had the good sense to seize upon this. President Nixon, in his 1967 Foreign Affairs article, made pretty clear what his strategic view was and presaged in that article the opening of a U.S.-China relationship. But it had to wait until the Chinese were ready.

Q: You left Beijing in 1976 and you went back to Washington. What were you doing?

THAYER: I went back to Washington as country director for Chinese Affairs as Oscar Armstrong moved up to deputy assistant secretary, replacing Bill Gleysteen who went over to the National Security Council staff.

Q: What did Chinese Affairs encompass in those days?

THAYER: The office used to be called the Office of Asian Communist Affairs, encompassing Vietnam as well as, I guess, North Korea and Mongolia. By the time I came into that job, it was only Mongolia.

Q: And China.

THAYER: And China, of course,

Q: And the PRC, but not Taiwan.

THAYER: Not Taiwan. Taiwan was a separate office, right.

So I came into that job in the summer of 1976. Two of my brothers had died while I was in Beijing, and after the second brother died, I felt I had to come back. So I asked for an early

transfer, remaining long enough to help Ambassador Gates get settled. David Dean came out to replace me, and I came back to take over the job that Oscar Armstrong had held. That was in the late summer of '76.

In the fall of '76, these events in China took place. We also had the U.S. election. It seemed to me, and to others, of course, that we could begin preparing for the new administration to move the relationship along, which we did.

Q: Had Carter, during the campaign, made any campaign promises about relations with China?

THAYER: I think there had been generally positive things said by the candidate.

Q: But nothing that gave you real marching orders?

THAYER: Well, frankly, I don't recall exactly what he said, but he had people advising him who were very sympathetic with moving the relationship along. Dick Holbrooke was one, and Dick became assistant secretary of state for East Asian Affairs. Mike Oxenberg, I think, also contributed to some briefings for Carter. He came on the NSC as Brzezinski's China guy. So there was a general feeling that all wanted to move the relationship along. It wasn't a new idea. But we all felt that perhaps now was the time that we could do a little bit more.

Q: The reason I ask, I was in Korea at the time, and Carter had made the specific thing about withdrawing American troops from Korea, which was, to all of us, a lousy idea. And I think it became apparent to him, too, because they weren't withdrawn. But you didn't have that sort of albatross hung around your neck?

THAYER: No, but I might mention that the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Korea was an albatross for U.S.-Korean relations, but it was the kind of signal that could be helpful to U.S.-China relations.

Q: Let's talk about this time you were there. Let's talk about what you were doing prior to the actual change of administration.

THAYER: We were just continuing the routine cool relationship with the Chinese, nothing very fancy. That didn't last once the new administration came in. I took over in September, I think—late August or September '76—and the election was November '76. We were in a marking-time period until the new administration came in. I don't want to exaggerate my role in preparing for a policy change. It was just part of the discussions about what we would do next.

But I will say that I had in mind at that time and mentioned to Art Hummel, who was then assistant secretary, the possibility of forming a team made up of Al Romberg, who was then a National Security Council staffer under Gleysteen, a China specialist, and a very bright guy, now with the Council on Foreign Relations, and the other half of the team would be Stape Roy, who was my deputy, had been Armstrong's deputy and is now executive secretary of the department (later Ambassador to the PRC). I had in mind those two guys. In fact, as we moved into the normalization negotiations, Roy and Romberg became key players in reviewing the record of the Kissinger-Zhou En-lai talks, formulating the policy memos that the State Department produced first for Secretary [Cyrus] Vance and later for the President. The team of China specialists working on U.S.-China relations was led by Bill Gleysteen who came in as senior deputy assistant secretary under Dick Holbrooke, who was Vance's assistant secretary. Dick took a very strong interest in developing U.S.-China relations, as he did U.S.-Vietnam relations, which is, of course, another subject.

(Dick Holbrooke was an exceedingly able, controversial but able—I consider him a good friend—advocate of moving on U.S.- China relations, and he arranged, before inauguration, for a group of us to brief Secretary Vance on U.S.-China relations and made certain proposals to him before Carter took over, about where we should go on U.S.-China relations.)

Mike Oxenberg in the NSC was very high on and instrumental in moving the relationship along. We had some very good people. Burt Levin and Harvey Feldman on the Taiwan desk. Paul Kreisberg, the deputy head of policy planning staff at that time, had a role also. Mort Abramowitz, originally a China specialist, was deputy assistant secretary for International Security Affairs over in Defense; he had a role, too. Later, on the China desk, Don Anderson and Lynn Pascoe were valued players, as was Charles Freeman, who was a key player on the task force set up after December 15, 1978, to coordinate the follow-on actions, including the Deng visit. There were some extremely able, highly motivated people involved in putting together a China policy, elements of a China policy, as the Carter administration began to get in gear. Incidentally, there was a national security decision memorandum which ended up on the front pages of the New York Times because of some dispute allegedly going on about arms sales to the Chinese, where they named myself and Bill Gleysteen and Mort Abramowitz and, I guess, Mike Oxenberg as having particular viewpoints on this issue. That was early in the administration.

We got into a diversion with the Chinese over the settlement of the claims-assets issue. This was U.S. property seized by the Chinese, held by the Chinese, and Chinese assets blocked by us. That was an issue that came prematurely on the front burner, and we wasted a lot of time actually trying—but failing—to get that settled before we moved into the serious normalization negotiations.

Secretary Vance along with Holbrooke, Gleysteen and others, I accompanied on his first visit to China in August of '77, which basically opened the negotiations.

Q: Can you give a little feel for the atmosphere of the changeover from administrations from your particular point of view in the China field? Was this a hostile takeover? Was this, "Let's try something else"? How did you feel about this new group coming in and they feel about you?

THAYER: Dick Holbrooke personified the administration in the East Asia Bureau. Dick was the new assistant secretary for East Asia and Pacific, vigorous, aggressive, intellectually very alive, clearly anxious to make his mark. So there was no doubt who was running the East Asia Bureau in the policy sense. Bill Gleysteen was chosen by Dick as his senior deputy, and that was a blessing for the bureau, Bill being one of the ablest Foreign Service officers of his day.

Q: He was later ambassador to Korea when I was there and a China hand.

THAYER: And also a China hand and a great public servant. So when Holbrooke took over, Dick made clear to us he was interested in moving on China policy, and he was interested in drawing on the professionals to do so. It was two very happy combinations. He came down to the China desk early on, along with Bill Gleysteen, and met with myself and Stape Roy, who was deputy, and one or two others in my office, and we discussed China policy. Right from the beginning Dick Holbrooke was a strong advocate on the policy question.

In fact, Dick, in the end—this may be irrelevant to this project—but in the end I was the only country director who remained from the former regime who was still in place three years later. This was not anything particular about me so much, I think, but symbolized that Dick was determined to work constructively with the China professionals; he needed them, and we shared pretty much the same goals. Our communications were first rate. With Bill Gleysteen, our China man in the front office, later to be replaced by Roger Sullivan when Bill went off to Korea, direct with Dick Holbrooke or with the seventh floor—all these channels were always first rate.

One thing I'll say for this historical record is that one of Dick Holbrooke's great virtues—and he's taken a lot of beating from a lot of people who don't like him—was that he was eager to hear dissent. I never hesitated to disagree with Dick Holbrooke, and did so in handwritten notes, in more formal memoranda, on the telephone, in person. I remember

once catching him on the elevator to berate him for something that he was trying to do in China policy. Dick had the self- confidence and the open-mindedness never to take offense. He didn't feel his rank being challenged at all. He liked the intellectual give-and-take. And the result of this facet of Holbrooke's personality was that he picked brains and made creative people more creative. I don't count myself as a particularly creative person, but if I had any contribution to make there, it was helping to manage a creative process, keep the paper moving and keep people moving constructively, asking questions, making the best use out of talent. And with Stape Roy and Al Romberg and others, there was ample talent to go around there. But Dick was, for me, almost always a pleasure to work for.

U.S.-China, U.S.-Vietnam, and U.S.-Soviet policy all were entangled there, and this made the policy aspects of Dick Holbrooke's job a lot more complicated than one would ordinarily think, because to some extent these three strands of policy were crossed, occasionally short-circuited or blocked each other, and that was an important element.

But to come back to your question, how did I, as a professional, feel when this new group took over, I felt very comfortable with it. There were, however, in the course of the three years, a lot of problems. We had a lot of problems with the National Council staff. You're familiar with the Brzezinski-Vance problems. Whatever the facts about that, there were some problems—Brzezinski and Vance, as we all know— and there were lots of tactical bureaucratic operational problems between, on the one hand, the National Security staff, and, on the other, the State Department staff, the Foreign Service China specialists and others.

Q: Can you give some illustration of the types of things that were working to effect your operations vis-#-vis China?

THAYER: Well, I'll be a little cautious here, but just to say that often the Brzezinski agenda was not the same as the Vance agenda. And, therefore, the Oxenberg agenda was frequently not the same as the Thayer agenda or the Holbrooke agenda.

Q: Oxenberg was the China man in the National Security Council staff.

THAYER: So oftentimes not all the cards were on the table between NSC staff and the East Asia Bureau, and it took quite a lot of extra effort to keep track of what Mike Oxenberg, on his own or on Zbig's behalf, was up to at any given time. I just want to add that since those days, Mike Oxenberg and I are still talking, and we both recognize this was a problem between us. To some extent the problems were almost endemic in that kind of a situation. In any event, we had the common goal of a China policy that best served U.S. interests.

Q: What would be a problem? With a policy towards a foreign country, why would the two people responsible in the NSC and in the State Department be moving in different directions?

THAYER: I think it's fair to say that there were differences between Vance, Holbrooke and Brzezinski, for example, on how fast we should move on U.S.-Vietnam relations, and that had some impact on how we perceived the pace of U.S.- PRC relations. Nayan Chanda covers this to some extent in his book Brother Enemy.

Because of differences in perception of the desired pace of these respective relationships, there were various tactical things that went along with that, differences between what the NSC would like to do and what the East Asia Bureau would like to do. I am being elliptical because some of these issues are still alive to some extent.

Q: Well, particularly with China, can you say there were those that are dealing with China, either in the NSC or in the office of Chinese affairs, ones that were saying, “Let's go slow with firming up relations”? Because obviously at this particular time we had this emotional

and strong political tie—I'm speaking of American internal politics related to Taiwan—and to recognize the People's Republic of China fully would mean the diminishing of our official relationships with Taiwan. How was this playing out? Were there sides on this, or were you saying, "That's a Democrat-Republican problem and that's not ours. We'll tell you the way it should be," or something like that?

THAYER: There were surprisingly little differences within the government, within the executive branch, relating to Taiwan. There wasn't a manifestation of the China lobby in my office or in the East Asia Bureau or in the legal advisor's office. At least it wasn't an important factor. Every one of us were convinced that we had to retain some kind of relationship with Taiwan, that the continuation of arm sales was important and that American businesses must have access and so forth—even though these things were not all covered fully in our initial presentation of the Taiwan Relations Act. But there was a unanimity about the overall project. The project was to normalize relations with the PRC, to retain some kind of relationship between the people of the United States and the people of Taiwan, because it was pretty well understood we would have to break diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

Some people on the Hill didn't agree with that, as we know from the public record. But within the planning group, there was no disagreement on the essence. There was a lot of discussion, quite a high intellectual level, it seemed to me, about what we should be doing, what we should be using as a basis for negotiation with the PRC, how we should go about retaining those things that were essential in our relationship with Taiwan. This was a group of people who cared tremendously about doing the right thing by Taiwan as well as pursuing the U.S. interest with the PRC.

So the level of intellectual discourse in moving on this policy over a two-year period, was very high. And it was, in many ways for me, a thrilling experience to be involved in this process of trying to move history along but doing it in an honorable and a productive way, that is to say, productive for the long run. So it was a matter of working from a common

bias, a shared vision of what we wanted to achieve. The real differences were in how we best go about it, and that was a natural and healthy process.

The first part of this process, incidentally, was to analyze the many, many hours of conversations between Henry Kissinger and Zhou En-lai and Mao dating back to the first 1971 visit. The State Department had not had access to the records of those conversations until the Carter administration. So when Carter came in, one of the first things we were able to do was to get access to these records which were held by the White House, and analyzed them to give us the platform from which we could then figure out how to move ahead.

Q: Was this because of secrecy? Was this a normal thing, these documents being held so tightly? Or was this Henry Kissinger in operation or what?

THAYER: A lot of the above, I would say. But the nature of the situation when Kissinger first went to the PRC to some extent required an absolute confidentiality. And Kissinger didn't trust the State Department. He didn't trust many people. So these records were kept very carefully. And even today, you will have seen very little reference to the particulars of the Kissinger-Zhou En-lai dialogue. I will say here only that the dialogue was elegant, and it showed two marvelous minds at work toward a common purpose with great historical and philosophical sweep.

In any event, the first documentary analyses that we did were based on these records of the Kissinger meetings, which we kept extremely carefully, double locked, and double sign-in and sign-out, and so forth, read only in one room with a light off, etc. We were determined also that it was important to keep the confidence of the Chinese that we were serious in our purpose and not going to use these historic records loosely.

Q: Harry, on something as sensitive as changing our relationship basically with Taiwan, did you keep Congress informed? Did you have a dialogue with staff members? Because this would strike me that if there's any issue—well, also the other one was the Panama

Canal issue, that the Carter administration really was making two major difficult political foreign policy—

THAYER: SALT, also.

Q: SALT, yes, and really the Camp David thing. I mean, this was really the administration coming in, wasn't going to sit around and react. It was going to try to do things. But what was the approach towards Congress as you went about this?

THAYER: Dick Holbrooke is very much a political animal and worked hard to maintain and develop personal ties on the Hill. For example, he invited the head of the East Asia and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee—Lester Wolf, in those days, Congressman Wolf of New York—to sit with us at a weekly East Asia staff meeting. So he was very sensitive about the need for congressional support and consulted carefully with a whole range of people on both sides of the Hill. Our consultations on China were informal, and we talked often, at all levels, with individual members of both houses and their staffs.

Q: On both sides?

THAYER: On both sides, Republican and Democrat. We also testified in informal committee sessions. Harvey Feldman and I, I remember once, went up and testified together. Harvey was then director for Taiwan, having replaced Burt Levin. We went up and testified informally on the relationships there and touched on possible outlines of a normalization agreement. But State did not have what the Congress felt was appropriate consultations with China. And the Hill raised holy hell with us and with the president when he announced the normalization of relations with China, explicitly accusing that we had not consulted Congress adequately.

In fact, we had told them virtually everything in substance, but we hadn't said, “And we plan to do this so-and-so at such-and-such a time, and we are negotiating these things

right at this very time." But to any reader of the newspapers, it was obvious that there was a lot going on in the relationship, a lot of signs of progress in the relationship. Brzezinski visited China in May 1978. Others in the Executive Branch went. And also there were congressional visitors, a lot of them, going to Beijing at the time. We encouraged a lot of this. So there was no question that the Congress could get the message, but formal consultations, consultations that the Congress felt were adequate, no. I think the record shows that plenty of congressmen felt that they were not consulted adequately about normalization.

Q: Was this a political game that was played of outrage when they knew what was going on, or were they really being kept from significant facts, and was there a reason for this?

THAYER: Congress has all kinds of people in it, and there were plenty of people in Congress who were very strong supporters of Chiang Kai-shek and Taiwan, quite a substantial constituency, although not as much as before, who held the same view. There was obviously a lot of resistance to any break in relations with Taiwan, which was one of the results of the negotiations and one that we anticipated. We did not want to derail the normalization negotiations by tipping our hand too much on the Hill in terms of timing or details of an agreement. That was an important factor.

Q: What was your impression of President Carter at the time regarding this? Was he a player? Was he a pusher or what?

THAYER: President Carter was very much a player. I think he was so on many issues. But in the China thing, memoranda that we drafted went to the president, he read them, marked them—very much a player. It was his personal decision— at least he was one of those who made the decision—that the access to the facts of the normalization negotiations, knowledge of that, be extremely restricted. And we restricted it within the State Department in 1978, kept it entirely in the East Asia Bureau, knowledge of negotiations, handled the paper extremely carefully. So the way we handled the Congress

and the public side of normalization, the president was very much aware of and in favor of —encouraged it. The president absolutely knew of the degree to which we were limiting our formal consultations, to come back to that point.

Q: Were you involved or aware of how we were keeping the Taiwan side informed of what we were doing?

THAYER: Yes, but we were not keeping them informed in any detail as to what we were doing. We had, in earlier years, informed the Chinese, the Republic of China Chinese Embassy, about the outlines of progress in the Warsaw talks or lack of progress in the Warsaw talks. But we were then in a different mode with the PRC. By 1977, we were not keeping Taipei fully informed about our discussions with the PRC. By 1978 we were not even keeping State's policy planning staff informed.

Q: Did you have the feeling—you and also those dealing with China, and I'm speaking about both sides of the equation—that the Republic of China government was really preparing itself and had braced itself for a new type of relationship, but, having little choice, they were ready, after a lot of unhappiness, to accept something as long as there was a solid relationship with the United States?

THAYER: Well, the Chinese from Taiwan—the “Republic of China” Chinese—were not in favor of normalization of U.S. relations with the PRC. They saw our peaceful relations with the PRC probably as constructive, but they certainly were never in favor of U.S. breaking relations with the Republic of China. However, they were aware that plenty was going on. Any reader of the newspaper would know that there was plenty going on, and that goes for people on the Hill as well as people in Taiwan. So they were aware. The signals were there, but we were not spelling it out for them.

Q: As this went on, did things fall out the way all of you thought they would who had been dealing with this when you first opened this? The Institute for China, or whatever you call

it with Taiwan, keeping that relation—was that more or less how you saw the thing coming out or did that grow?

THAYER: Well, in the end, we sought, as part of the normalization plan, to establish a relationship with Taiwan something along the so-called “Japanese model,” which was an unofficial relationship but carrying out pretty much the same functions as in an official relationship. And so the Japanese model, which we examined very closely, was the basis for our approach.

As it turned out, we needed—much more than the Japanese had needed—to do a lot more U.S. internal legal adjustments to be in a position to carry on a relationship with Taipei parallel to the Japanese model relationship. We needed a legal structure, and we needed laws to make it possible for Foreign Service officers to be separated from the Foreign Service and work unofficially in Taipei, because we were determined, among other things, to be as good as our word. That is to say: our relationship with Taiwan was going to be conducted on a non- official basis. Well, we needed a lot of laws for that, and we put together the Taiwan Relations Act which would establish the American Institute in Taiwan and its legal structure. We sent a draft Taiwan Relations Act to the Hill after the president's announcement on December 15, 1978. We sent to the Hill a Taiwan Relations Act which would enable us to carry on this unofficial relationship, this people-to-people relationship implementing commercial, cultural, and other elements.

The reception to the Taiwan Relations Act on the Hill was outrage. What we did was to send up a package which covered the legal requirements of establishing this unofficial relationship but did not have the political elements such as security concerns and so forth in it that the friends of the Republic of China, in particular, but also many others of a more neutral stance, thought was appropriate for the circumstances.

So to put it succinctly, the administration—I think it's pretty clear—badly underestimated what the Hill reaction was going to be to this skeleton of a Taiwan Relations Act. It

wasn't broad enough for the Congress. We didn't present it in the best possible way. Our testimony was not good. And we got torn apart by the Congress for this. It simply was a case of just not estimating correctly how this package that we put together would sell.

Q: What happened? To follow through, from your perspective, did Congress strengthen it, harm it, skew it, or what?

THAYER: Well, Congress took our skeletal Taiwan Relations Act designed for specific operational purposes and made it into a political document which went far beyond what the administration had intended. But the administration was able to avoid the most troublesome aspects being proposed that would, you might say, tend to re-officialize the U.S. relationship with Taiwan. For example, we did not want in the Taiwan Relations Act any reference to the “Republic of China,” for perfectly obvious reasons. We didn't recognize the “Republic of China;” therefore, it would be inappropriate to refer to it by that name.

One of the things that we did in normalization was to give a one-year notice of abrogation of our Mutual Security Treaty. We would not have a formal defense commitment to Taiwan at that time, and we sought to not have any formal security commitment introduced into the Taiwan Relations Act. So there was a lot of dispute over this, a lot of very hot, heartfelt outraged dispute with many of those opposed to the administration policy absolutely convinced that the administration was engaging in an immoral act by breaking relations with Taiwan. The administration was equally convinced, as I was—quite low on the totem pole—that what we were doing was very much in the national interest, entirely appropriate, and moral. As long as we maintained these people-to-people relations with Taiwan and fulfilled the other commitments embodied in the skeletal Taiwan Relations Act in the announcement of normalization in the president's statement, so long as we did everything we said we'd do, we were acting morally.

But this was a matter of hot debate, and there was a lot of blood on the floor in the process. I wasn't on the front lines of this aftereffect. My role was to continue to work on developing U.S.-PRC relations, and others were taking most of the heat on the Taiwan Relations Act.

Q: How did the PRC react? We said we'd do this, and then it got into Congress and really the things were changed, weren't they? How were they reacting?

THAYER: Well, we had made clear to the PRC Chinese all along that there would be certain legal steps we'd have to go through. They didn't like that, but we hadn't explained to them the kind of Taiwan Relations Act that there would end up being because we didn't know the kind of Taiwan Relations Act there would end up being. The Chinese were not happy about what was produced by the Congress.

Q: What was your impression of how the People's Republic of China were dealing with Congress? Do you think they were getting good reports so that they were pretty well informed about how the system worked and the pressures and all this?

THAYER: I think they were pretty well informed, but not very. The Chinese liaison office, as it was at that time, was staffed by people who were pretty competent. Some of them had been educated in the States. Others had served for a long time in the liaison office. The liaison office had quite good relations with and access to the Hill. I'm sure they were surprised by the amount of activity for continued support of the Republic of China on the Hill, and they didn't expect the kind of Taiwan Relations Act they would get. But the reporting was fairly good.

I think it's pretty damn hard for any country to understand how our political system works, and it's particularly difficult for a China that had been so out of touch with the U.S. for so long. But they had people following U.S. affairs in Beijing over the years, and they had their American experts and so forth. But it's quite a different thing in understanding the

dynamics of Congress. After all, the Carter administration misread the strength of the Congress's reaction.

Q: You're saying the State Department, even the Carter administration, really misjudged the vehemence which Congress would react to this.

THAYER: Well, it seems to me we did, anyhow, and so did the PRC. But the PRC consistently made it clear that it was our responsibility to keep our own house in order, and the PRC quite understandably did not want to take responsibility for the way the U.S. Congress behaved.

Q: Did you have the feeling that at any time our new establishment of relations was being jeopardized by the Congress and the backwards and forwards as we worked on the Taiwan Relations Act?

THAYER: There were risks there if some of the language proposed by the—for want of a better term—right wing in Congress, if some of the language proposed had stayed in the Taiwan Relations Act, it would have violated certain specific and implicit undertakings to the Chinese. I mean, for example, the use of the term “Republic of China.” Now, whether that would have led to the derailing of the whole process or not, I can't say. But surely we were worried that some of the efforts might succeed, and that would be a problem.

Q: You left in '79.

THAYER: I stayed on until the summer of '79, and the last thing I did was to write a scope paper for Vice President [Walter] Mondale's pending trip to China which took place in June or July of '79.

Q: How were things at that time? When you left, did you see a new relationship?

THAYER: The relationship had begun to settle down pretty well. The episode of the Taiwan Relations Act left a lot of bad feelings on the Hill, and I won't say that those bad

feelings had wholly dissipated. But things had calmed down a lot, and the relationship was beginning to move along.

Q: Why don't we stop at that point, I think, and then do another interview later.

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Q: Harry, I wonder if you could start with how you became ambassador to Singapore, where you served from 1980 to 1984.

THAYER: I had been country director for Chinese affairs in the Carter administration, '76 to '79. It was following that that I was appointed by Carter as ambassador to Singapore. I had a year out between the China desk job and the ambassador's job as a member of the Senior Seminar. But, in any event, I was appointed by Carter in 1980, and Carter sent my name up to the Hill. Since my hearing was not until after the election in 1980, my name had to be cleared with the Republican victors also.

Q: Were you actually out there at the time?

THAYER: No, I was in Washington. My name was sent up to the Hill in the autumn of 1980. The election was in November. My nomination cleared through the committee after the election, and the agreement of the Republicans was obtained that my name would go through. I'd go out as a Carter appointee but would stay on, at least initially, under the Reagan administration.

Q: How did this happen? Singapore is one of those places that's had a fairly substantial number of non-career officers. I would think that this would be an ideal place for one of the Reagan West Coast businessmen to go to.

THAYER: It's a nice post in many ways, and it does have a reputation of being an attractive post, but, in fact, until the first Carter appointee, who was a former governor of North Dakota, the post had been filled by career officers right along. That not withstanding,

it was very shortly after I got out to Singapore—I arrived there in early December 1980—that I began to hear rumors and saw several newspaper references to different friends of President Reagan from California and Arizona who were telling people that they were going out as ambassador for Singapore. In fact, about a year after we arrived in Singapore my wife, in Washington on private business, ran into a man at a party who told her, not knowing she was the current Ambassador's (me) wife, that he was about to be named to the Singapore job. My wife quietly just took that aboard. So from the very start, as one must be in such a post, I was always ready at any moment to be recalled and replaced by a personal friend of the President. Nevertheless, I did end up staying there for three and a half years, which was longer than most people stay in any post.

Q: In the political climate, particularly at that time, it's amazing that you did.

THAYER: Well, there are various tales told about that. I did see one outrageous but somewhat amusing reference in the newspaper to the effect that we stayed there for three and a half years because we were renting our house to Michael Deaver, and if we came back, Michael Deaver would, of course, have to be moved out. Michael Deaver was in the White House, as you know, very close to the President and Mrs. Reagan. In any event, the explanation—and I have no idea if it had any basis or not—was that if a political appointee replaced me in Singapore, that meant I would come back, or perhaps would come back to Washington, and the Deavers would have to vacate their— i.e., our—house. I don't know whether that story is true or not. I just saw it in the newspaper.

Q: It makes a certain logical sense.

THAYER: In any event, we did stay there. We did stay there until the summer of '84, a very good tour.

Q: In this period, from '81 to '84, what did you see, as you went out and as they developed, the American interests in that country?

THAYER: The instructions that I was given (by Assistant Secretary Dick Holbrooke and others) principally was to find out what the Singapore leadership, from Prime Minister Lee on down, was thinking. Our access, for a variety of reasons, had been very limited in the previous few years; Singapore was a very important player on the Southeast Asia scene, and we didn't know enough about it. At that time, ASEAN was still moving ahead. The Cambodian issue was of growing interest to us: finding some way of reducing Vietnamese and communist influence in Cambodia. Singaporeans were leading players in that game. Singapore also had a certain amount of influence with its ASEAN partners. (ASEAN eventually did much toward the non-communist Khmer getting their act together.) And beyond that, because of Lee's personality, other influence.

So one personal requirement was that I develop relations of confidence with the senior Cabinet people, deputy prime ministers Rajaratnam and Goh, and with the prime minister, if possible, so that I could, if nothing else, report what they were thinking. So that was the first thing.

But we had several interests that were important there. First, maybe not in priority order but could be arguably so, we had the use of Singapore's port facilities. We had no base there, but with our build-up then in the Indian Ocean, Singapore was an important stopping-off point, refueling point, for ships, a touchdown point for P-3s and others.

Q: P-3 being a sea surveillance aircraft.

THAYER: Right. They were flying out to Diego Garcia. So maintenance of good military relationships was important in those days. There were some rumors in the '80s, some noises about our establishing some kind of a base in Singapore, but there was no serious effort in that direction at all. Although, ten years later now, we do have agreements with Singapore for U.S. enhanced use of facilities in Singapore. So the military was one interest.

Another interest was our general and supportive interest in ASEAN, as I've mentioned. A third interest was a very large American private investment. I forget the numbers now, but we had investments in electronics, pharmaceuticals, Mobil had a big refinery, Exxon was active there. Singapore was a regional headquarters for a number of American corporations. The American business community was very large, and, therefore, promotion of American business interests there was important. Singapore was also economically very successful, and Singapore, not only the private sector but the public sector, the government sector, was also buying a lot. One of my big jobs was on the commercial side, trying to sell American aircraft— 767s, 757s, 747s—getting a piece of the new mass transit system. These kinds of things were also important.

I would add to that that I had personal interest in developing, broadly speaking, a cultural relationship. Singapore traditionally, having been a British colony, sent its best students to be educated in Oxbridge, as they call it. The prime minister himself is a product of that system, and their best graduates at Singapore University were going to graduate school in the U.K. I thought it was very much in our interest to attract a better grade of Singapore students to American universities, because, among other things, Singaporeans were returning to Singapore and filling the important jobs in the civil service. It was important in the American interest, I felt strongly, that we have a larger cadre of American-educated civil servants in Singapore, thereby having a better understanding within the government of what made the Americans tick, more confidence in the American partnership, extending not only to the cultural sector but also to the commercial, military, and so forth.

So I made quite an effort to get bright Singaporeans to go to American schools. One of the things that I did was to lead an effort, do a lot of lobbying with the American Business Council—the equivalent of American Chamber of Commerce in other countries—to get them to put up some money, matching funds, to facilitate the Singaporean Presidential Scholars; that is, the leading scholars graduating from Singapore universities, getting scholarships from the Singapore Government to go to the States to do graduate work,

whereas heretofore, they'd always gone to the U.K. The most prestigious scholarships had been going to send people to the U.K., and I wanted to get these prestigious scholarships, have some precedent set for their going to the United States.

This became very important to me when six months after my arrival I was invited to the Presidential awards ceremony where the President of Singapore Presided and all the Cabinet sat by as these Presidential Scholars, a dozen or so, were being “crowned” and sent off to the U.K. to study. While I saw scholarship after scholarship being awarded for study at Oxbridge or Manchester or someplace else, my American blood boiled, and that fired me up to raise the money from the American side to help and to press the Singapore side to cooperate.

Q: Who had been paying on the British side?

THAYER: The Singaporeans had been paying entirely, but I felt that by getting the American business community to get behind it and paying part of the way that we could demonstrate the seriousness of our purpose to the Singaporeans and get their attention; I felt also that a budget-conscious Singapore government would see that there would be several layers of benefits from regarding seriously an American bid to attract some of their best scholars. And so that was another facet of the work that I did.

Q: Why don't we follow through on that. How did that play out while you were there?

THAYER: While I was there, it took a while—a couple of years—to get the American business community sold on the idea. We—including USIS and the commercial officer—worked hard to sell this first to the American business community. Then we needed to talk it through with the Singaporean side, the education ministry and so forth. Eventually, by the time I left Singapore, we still had not fully succeeded. But a year after I left, our first Presidential Scholar went to the United States to study, on the basis I had first conceived. I don't know how many have gone since, but we did have a breakthrough and had this

precedent set that it was worth sending some of the best scholars to the United States. That was the message that I was trying to encapsulate.

So that was another small aspect. I bolstered this with giving public speeches about American education and comparing the American educational system, the number of Nobel Prize winners and so forth, to other countries, generally trying to enhance the regard which Singaporeans had in general for the American educational system. I should emphasize that since the best scholars often entered the civil service, their attitudes toward the U.S. made a difference to many facets of Singapore's foreign policy.

Also an important part of the American mission was the refugee issue, which was very significant—Cambodian refugees, Vietnam refugees, who were pouring down into Southeast Asia, to Thailand, to Malaysia, to Indonesia, to the Philippines, also to Hong Kong. We had a refugee office in Singapore, which was the basis for our operation at Galang Island in Indonesia. In working with the Singapore government, we also were strong supporters of the UN camp for refugees in Singapore. So that was another facet of my work.

Q: What was the political situation in Singapore while you were there?

THAYER: The political situation was very much an environment dominated by the People's Action Party, its leader was Lee Kuan Yew, then still Prime Minister and very much in the saddle. There was only one member of the opposition in a Parliament of roughly seventy-five seats. It's a parliamentary system. Prime Minister Lee's cabinet, generally speaking, was made up of a so-called “second generation leadership”, guys in their thirties and forties. Lee turned sixty while I was there. It was very much a parliamentary system dominated by an extremely strong prime minister. There was a president, but his role was mostly ceremonial. That continues to be the system today. Of course, Prime Minister Lee has withdrawn as prime minister. But the People's Action Party was dominant then as it had been since the late '50s and continues so today.

Q: How did you deal with the government, you and your staff?

THAYER: We dealt very smoothly at, I would say, all levels of the government. In the four years I was there, we had no serious problems, I'm glad to say—not because of my skill but because the environment for the relationship was very good. Our withdrawal from Vietnam was in the past. Lee had been a big supporter of a strong American presence in Southeast Asia. He continued to be when I was there. President Reagan was determined to build up the American military. Lee thought that was a great thing for the United States and for Singapore. Lee had met Reagan in the '60s when he was governor of California, had maintained something of a relationship with him, felt warmly toward Reagan. The Reagan administration stress on removing trade restrictions was something that Lee was very supportive of. Singapore is very much an open market.

So in various ways the goals of the two governments were parallel and we had no major problems, no major sticking problems. In years past, Lee had been very offended by some episode with the CIA, and after I left, one of our political officers was PNGed [persona non grata]. It had something to do with talking to the opposition.But in my time there we simply didn't have major problems.

Q: Were you able to sit down and have long talks with Lee, or was he a fairly removed person?

THAYER: Lee was relatively inaccessible, and he was reputed, I think accurately, not to be too fond of diplomats. So building a relationship of confidence with Lee was a long-term effort, and it wasn't designed to put me in the position of dropping in for a drink every couple of days. It was designed to establish myself as a fairly reliable and sensible person that they could deal with, that Lee could deal with, that if he had something to say to our president he could say it through me with confidence; that if I had a message to deliver or something to say, I could be received with confidence.

But the need to build these relationships extended all over the Cabinet, including the top of the Foreign Ministry where we hadn't really had regular contact for reasons that it would take too much time to go into.

Q: Did you, by any chance, find that sometimes you have a second generation coming up, as you were saying, the people got independence, but then the younger generation coming up may have almost an anti-American feelings or they want to show that they're more nationalistic and American rubs their nerves raw? Did you find any of this problem there?

THAYER: We didn't really get that, I'm glad to say. There was a pretty pervasive attitude toward the United States as being a benign, if not always effective or reliable, partner, given the history of Vietnam and so forth. There wasn't a virulent kind of anti-Americanism. There wasn't any real strain of that. And I did spend quite a bit of time in one-on-one lunches with Cabinet and sub-Cabinet members, trying to probe their attitudes, the successor generation, and also with bankers, and others in the private sector, who tended to be Chinese, as well as the Malay element of the society. I really didn't find any significant anti-Americanism. That, of course, made the job a lot easier.

Q: You mentioned developing business interests. Was there concern that American businesses were putting an awful lot of investment into Singapore industry which would, in turn, be taking away jobs in the United States?

THAYER: There wasn't a concern reflected in my work or that impinged on my work. I remember early in my tour there had been difficulty in getting the American government to make a flat statement for the record that investment abroad was a good thing, to encourage American investment abroad. Our American Business Council wanted such a statement. In fact, if you look at the record of the early years, in '80 and previous to that, there was never a categorical statement—and I don't know if there is today—supporting American investment abroad. But it was clearly in our political interest to invest

in Singapore. American businesses could decide for themselves whether it was in their economic interest to invest in Singapore, and they did invest in Singapore. So that was not a real problem.

Perhaps the most interesting issue at that time, as far as American investment and commercial relations, business relations with Singapore went, was that the Singapore government (led, in many respects, by Prime Minister Lee), was on a kick then of having Singapore emulate Japan. They had study missions going to Japan to see how they do business. They invited Ezra Vogel, who is the author of Japan is Number One, to come from Harvard to give seminars in Singapore. There was an awful lot of talk about what a great place Japan was to emulate. They were better businessmen. They knew how to make industries modern and efficient. Their quality control methods were better. Their sales were more aggressive. They were more flexible in serving their customers and so forth and so on.

A lot of it was true, but in the course of this, the strong points about the American economy —and American contribution to Japan's success—were entirely lost. The newspapers, being not entirely free and in many ways eager to support their prime minister, kind of exaggerated these statements, and the theme was picked up at other levels. In good-mouthing the Japanese, there was an implicit bad-mouthing of American business qualifications. And this bothered me. So I did a number of things that were directed at countering this: among other things, making speeches where I could, opening every American investment—a Hardee's restaurant, a new factory, a pharmaceutical plant—and making speeches on these occasions.

I was invited to give a speech to the Rotary Club, at the annual Rotary meeting, a consolidated Rotary meeting in Singapore, and I chose that forum in a big hotel room with a thousand people there, everybody having eaten too much and so forth, but I gave a very serious talk, which was well researched by our economic and USIS sections, on the history of American quality control and modern industrial practices, demonstrating how

those things that the Singaporeans were trumpeting as attributable to the Japanese, how they all had their roots among more forward-looking American companies well before the Japanese gained such strength. I never mentioned Japan in this, but this was a speech designed not for the audience so much as it was for the newspapers, and it got a very good newspaper play.

I also quietly, without any publicity, conducted the President of Singapore on a visit to about fifteen American factories in Singapore. (This had the advantage, inter alia, of cementing my relations with the Americans in the private sector.) We would spend a full morning or a whole afternoon talking to the American managers about that particular American investment; how they were training the Singaporeans, how much they were paying the Singaporeans, what kind of workers they were, what more the Americans might do in the way of investment in Singapore. The President was very much interested in this, he having been a former labor leader. So there were various opportunities to do something to promote American business interests.

Q: What was your impression of the American business community? Were they with you? Were they flexible as far as dealing with the Singapore society?

THAYER: The American business community was, I thought, very good, and very well organized. Incidentally, I found the same thing in Taiwan, which is a comparable place in terms of American investment. Very well organized. Their representatives, generally speaking, were intelligent, were sensitive to the special concerns of the Singaporeans, were good Americans and good guests. My relations with the American Business Council, as it was called in Singapore, were intimate. My econ/commercial chief was on the board of the American Business Council. I attended virtually every periodic meeting of the Business Council. Once every month or two months I had an open meeting at the residence in which I and my staff gave them a briefing on economic, political, all kinds of issues that the Embassy had some expertise in, that they might not have. When I went to attend the American meetings with ASEAN annually or went to Washington on

consultations, I came back and would give a briefing to the business people on these meetings. My DCM, Mort Smith, followed by Ed Kempe, and my econ/pol counselor, Bill Spruce, gave me very good advice and made heavy contributions here.

The American Business Council not only was the American business community, it was also the same group of people who pretty much ran the American School. The American School was a very important institution for the Americans in Singapore and, therefore, very important to me and to my staff. The Singaporeans took the American business community seriously. They wanted more Americans there. The investment environment was very deliberately enhanced to entice the Americans to put money into Singapore.

The Americans sat on various committees that the government established, including the committees that set wage levels. So I would say not only were my relations with them intimate, but the Singapore government's relations with the American business community were intimate, and the business community had good access to the key Singaporean government people. The quality of the American business representatives, I felt, generally was very high, and to me it was very much a plus of the job. Incidentally, the Prime Minister's wife, a lawyer, told me at dinner one night that she regularly read the American community's newspaper, a monthly, as I recall.

Q: How about your staff at the embassy? How did you find them?

THAYER: The staff at the embassy was very good. One of the reasons it was good is because Singapore has a reputation of being a desirable post, not because of the ambassador, but because Singapore is, in fact, a good place to live. The steady humidity and heat, unwavering, does get you down. It is isolated for those who can't afford airfare out of Singapore. But it's secure. The schools are good. The medical facilities are very good, etc. And so nobody had to be bludgeoned to go to Singapore. There were always good bidders for DCM jobs. We had a fine USIS contingent, had an agricultural officer

and military attach#s, plus a Coast Guard contingent that inspected ships being built in Singapore for American and other users. The staff generally was very good.

We had a larger economic and financial operation, Singapore being a financial center, than we did political. And we only had a couple of political officers. We had one officer who specialized in finance and various aspects of the economic scene, very high-quality officers. For me it was a marvelous learning opportunity because there were lots of brains around to pick. If ever you ran out of American brains, there was always this very bright Singapore civil service whose brains you could pick. So it was a great learning experience.

Q: Singapore has very tough laws on narcotics. Did you have any problem with Americans coming in? I'm talking about tourists and all getting involved.

THAYER: I should have mentioned that we also had a DEA office in Singapore.

Q: Drug Enforcement Agency.

THAYER: A Drug Enforcement Agency office—two fellows. Quite high quality. Worked well in the country team context. But they had a regional job. A principal job was exchanging information with the Singapore narcotics people and keeping track of this tremendous flow of ships and planes and so forth going through Singapore.

We had a couple of Americans arrested in Singapore on minor narcotics charges. It was pretty clear to me that one day we were going to have an American arrested on a major one, and the problem of the possibility of his being executed was going to be there, or flogged. But the Singapore government was adamant about narcotics, and we could only be supportive of that, and our relationship with them is very good on this front.

Q: Did you have any major problems while you were there?

THAYER: We did not have any major drug problem while I was there. On the other hand, we did have some very good cooperative drug busts with the Singaporeans.

Q: Were there any issues where you found yourself at loggerheads on world policy issues?

THAYER: We were not at loggerheads on really major issues. We had a problem on international copyrights, for example, which, as you know, is not unique to Singapore. But the Singaporeans were quite reluctant, while I was there, to move on the protection of American intellectual property rights, particularly books, for example. The American book publishers were up in arms about the Singaporeans. In fact, while I was there, they were very critical of the failure of the Embassy to do what they thought was enough in support of them. But I will say that within a couple of years, partly because of Secretary Shultz's intervention with the prime minister, that we did come to—after my departure—I think, a satisfactory agreement with the Singaporeans.

Q: Outside of just plain economic interest, I would think a country where many of the people had been trained in Great Britain, would have a respect for the rights of authors to receive the fruits of their labor. What was the rationale for not being very protective of this?

THAYER: As I recall, the rationale was that textbooks were often expensive and students shouldn't be asked to pay such huge amounts of money for textbooks if they didn't have to. I think that was the basic spoken rationale. I think there was kind of an underlying feeling of, “Well, hell, the Americans can afford it.” This is not at the top so much as kind of the environment in which they're operating. (I handled book piracy for our then-Embassy in Taipei in the '60's, and the Chinese there had made the same argument about “poor students.”)

Remember, audio tapes were also a big thing. I mean, the piracy of American music—you could go into a thousand different stores in Singapore and buy for two cents, roughly,

tapes of almost anything, low-quality tapes, but without the slightest bit of royalties being paid. That was pretty upsetting to the American music publishers.

Q: Were there any other things we might cover before we move to your next assignment?

THAYER: I think it's probably worth saying that one sore point with the Singaporeans throughout my tour was that the Singaporeans did not provide refuge for boat people. Refugees would come down from Vietnam on their boats, and they would come into Singapore Harbor. On one—notorious—occasion before I got there, the Singapore authorities simply pushed off a boat—towed it back to sea and a person drowned, a big scandal. Singaporeans, I believe, eventually became willing to refuel the boats, but they did not let them stay in Singapore, and they were adamant about that. Particularly since we were pressing other ASEANs to receive first asylum cases, this was a bone of contention with us. The UN did have a camp in Singapore up near the border with Malaysia, but that camp was mostly for refugees in transit between first asylum camps elsewhere and transport to the U.S. or other countries.

Q: Did they make any contribution to some of the camps that were in other countries, or was any effort made to make the lot easier?

THAYER: They were hospitable to our headquarters in Singapore for handling our interests in Galang, Indonesia, and they were hospitable to the UN High Commissioner's operation there. So there was that positive side.

Q: This was a very positive tour of duty in Singapore?

THAYER: Yes.

Q: Should we move on then to your next assignment? [Tape Recorder Turned Off] How about with Congress?

THAYER: One can't speak about service in Singapore without mentioning that Singapore had a tremendous attraction for congressional visitors who would come by Singapore on their way from the Middle East. (The “straight-line-between two points” axion gets a bit distorted in this process!) Singapore seemed to be the shortest route to go through on the way from China to the United States. It was an important stopover place often on weekends for congressional visitors. This was for two reasons. In Singapore there's a lot of shopping and all those nice things about Singapore, which had a good reputation as a tourist place.But also Singapore was known—correctly—to Congress, and is known, as a central Southeast Asian country whose leader, Lee Kuan Yew, is one of the most articulate, most brilliant, and most experienced leaders in the world. So the congressmen — and everybody else, but congressmen especially—wanted to meet with Lee, and they wanted to hear what Lee had to say about American policy. Lee had lots to say about the American economy, which he followed extremely closely since Singapore was very vulnerable to fluctuations in the American economy. But Lee also had comments to make on the world scene, the Soviet Union, etc., etc., and congressmen wanted to hear this.

So we had a lot of congressional visitors. For us in the Embassy, this was an opportunity to help Congress, which was not ordinarily (for good reason) especially sensitive to what's going on in Southeast Asia, to become more familiar with that area, more familiar with the attitudes of some of the Southeast Asian players. So we took these visits very seriously and put a lot of effort into briefings and worked hard getting congressmen access to the key Singaporean leadership, especially the prime minister. And the Singaporeans recognized these congressional visits as valuable for their own purposes. So that was a big part of our life there.

Q: That's very interesting because here you have both players, you might say, the embassy and the government itself, understanding that there is a very positive side to these congressional delegations, which sometimes is overlooked.

THAYER: It's sometimes overlooked, but, in any case, there was no question in our mind that there was a net benefit to having congressional visitors. This did lead to one interesting episode for me, a little minor footnote that Foreign Service officers encounter from time to time. Lee, being the forceful personality he is and is endlessly curious about everything, after I had been here for a couple of years and built up something of a relationship with Lee, at least where he would receive me on this or that issue and we could talk, I escorted two visiting congressmen in to see him one day. One of them was Dick Cheney, now secretary of defense, and the other, I can't remember who it was right now. But in any event, the group got to talking, Lee and the congressmen. I just sat in on the meeting, taking a few notes. Lee and the congressmen were talking about the American political scene, which Lee was very familiar with. I was sitting quietly there listening and taking notes. Suddenly Lee turned to me and he said, “By the way, Mr. Thayer, what party are you a member of?”

And I thought for about five seconds and decided, “I'm not going to be pushed around. I'm going to stand my ground on this.” So I said, “Mr. Prime Minister, I'm a professional American diplomat, and how I vote, I think, is a private matter. If you don't mind, I'm not going to answer your question.”

Lee's eyes kind of popped, and he kind of stared at me for a moment and then went on with his conversation. Afterward the congressmen both applauded my answer to him, but I think Lee was somewhat nonplused. But I think that his respect for me was maintained or it went up a little bit, because I did say no to him, and there weren't many people who said no. [Laughter]

Q: You left Singapore, really, to a very interesting job, one that was basically absolutely unique. Could you explain where you went and how did you get the job?

THAYER: My job immediately after Singapore was director of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT). The American Institute in Taiwan is and was the quasi-embassy, non-

governmental, non-official entity that we established as of January 1, 1979 when we normalized relations with the PRC and broke government-to-government diplomatic relations with the former Republic of China, which is Taiwan. The American Institute in Taiwan is a contract organization headquartered in Rosslyn, Virginia, across the river, on contract to the State Department to carry out the people-to-people relationships— that is, commercial, cultural, and other relations—between the people of Taiwan and the people of the United States.

None of the AIT staff is legally an official employee of the American government. All of us who were Foreign Service officers were legally separated from the State Department for the duration of our employment by the American Institute in Taiwan. Under the Taiwan Relations Act we were separated without losing the various emoluments we would have accumulated if we had remained Foreign Service officers during that period and gone on to serve in some country with which we had formal diplomatic relations.

But the American Institute in Taiwan, which is modeled after the Japanese equivalent entity that they established when they broke relations with the PRC, is set up to conduct relations with Taiwan in very much the same way as an embassy conducts relations. We were broken down into the same kind of sections—political, economic, and so forth. But we called them by different names. The political section was called the General Affairs Section (GAS), for example. The consular section—what we usually know as the “Consular Section”—was called the Travel Service Section (TSS), etc.

The point being that we wanted to remove all the symbols of government-to-government relations and all the symbols of an embassy, while still being able to carry out the substantive work. We had no American flag flying in Taiwan. I was not known as Ambassador; I was known as Director. I did not call on officials of Taiwan in their—I never went to the foreign ministry, did not go into the offices of ministers. Generally speaking, I went to no government offices. There were some exceptions, but we kept the visibility and the symbols of the government-to-government relationship down. If I wanted to complain

to the Minister of Economic Affairs, as I did more than once, to get some trade problem straightened out, I would have to ask him to meet me either in a hotel room or a restaurant room which we would hire for the occasion, or in one of our buildings or in one of the Taiwan guest houses. In other words, an unofficial locus for an unofficial meeting between the representatives of two peoples rather than an official place where the representatives of two governments met.

This was an awkward way to do business. Having been on part of the team that helped establish the relationship with Beijing and dis-established the relationship with the government of the Republic of China (when I was head of the PRC desk 1976-79), I entirely approved of this anomaly that we created. But working on it day-to-day, which is one of the things that attracted me to the job, turned out to be a lot more complicated than I had anticipated. There wasn't a day that went by without having some decision about modalities, which would have come quickly and easily if AIT were an embassy, made in a way to maintain the unofficial aspect of the relationship. For example, making a demarche on a given subject required a decision about where—not automatically the traditional host government building—to use it.

Q: Would you explain what a demarche is?

THAYER: A demarche, at least as I use the term, is if we have a message to give another government asking them to do something or complaining about their not doing something, we would speak to a representative of the other government trying to get the government to take or not take certain actions.

I will say that the Taiwan authorities have their counterpart organization established at the same time as we established AIT. They had their counterpart organization in Washington, which is called the Coordination Council for North American Affairs (CCNAA), and they operate here in the same way as we operate there. In Taiwan, I technically didn't deal with the Foreign Ministry. I dealt with the head office of the Coordination Council for North

American Affairs, which was my counterpart. Things that we did were always under the rubric of that relationship between the AIT and CCNAA. We did have some direct contact with government officials, but they were in an unofficial setting or at a lower level.

Q: I would think that just this sort of diplomatic dance would get a little bit annoying for both of you, because it was a time-waster, wasn't it, to get to places? The only comparable place I can think of at all is the trip our people have to make to go from Tel Aviv up to Jerusalem to do any business at the foreign ministry because we won't put our embassy in Jerusalem.

THAYER: It did take time. It was also awkward. And it is a difficult arrangement for the Taiwan authorities. For a government—that using in lower case, as I must—the “Republic of China” had a great pride in itself. The government servants, particularly in the Foreign Ministry but also throughout the Government, had a pride in serving the “Republic of China”. The formal diplomatic relationship with the United States was very important to them for reasons we're all familiar with. To suddenly be told, “We're going to pretend that you're not a real government, and you're going to need to deal with us on this basis,” was hard for them to take. It was a matter of bitter contention, as we have talked about, in the United States Congress at the time and between the Taiwan authorities and ourselves at the time of normalization. And it continued to rankle not just the authorities in Taiwan, but also people around the government, senior businessmen and others, to be treated like a second-class country. In fact, we treated them as not a country but as a political entity which was part of China and an entity with which we did not have official relations.

So there was the awkwardness. It's a time-waster. Whatever the realties of the situation required, one cannot help but empathize with the members of the Taiwan organizations responsible for dealing with the Americans, empathize with their feeling of insult when we did not treat them as a sovereign entity. I agree entirely with the policy, which I worked hard on myself, but from a human point of view, it's easy to understand why it would be difficult for a senior official, somebody who is an official in the “Government of the Republic

of China" for twenty-five years, to suddenly be treated as if he were not an official of a government in good standing.

Q: This was about five years after the AIT had been set up, wasn't it? Were you the third director?

THAYER: I was the third director.

Q: Had a real modus vivendi been worked out so that you could pick up the phone and settle a lot of things this way, or did you just say, "Oh, just meet me out in front of the building and let's get this over with," or were they still being very prickly?

THAYER: We didn't quite get to the point of, "Meet me out in front of the building." But you're quite right in raising this question, because when the relationship was first established, there was little confidence, or certainly not full confidence, on the part of our friends in Taiwan that we could have an unofficial relationship that really worked. By the time I got there, thanks in part to not only those who preceded me in the job, Chuck Cross and Jim Lilley, but also because of the conduct of the whole of the American government in working out the relationship, by the time I got there, there was general acceptance that this relationship was a workable one, that the non-official relationship could adequately handle the substantive affairs that needed to be handled in the interests of both, as we say, the people of the United States and the people of Taiwan.

So we'd gotten past that period of serious doubts that it was workable. We were into a period where, nevertheless, some of the detailed activities rankled, and that continues to this day. While I was there, I was often bearded by counterparts or friends among the Taiwan authorities who would say, "Why can't you guys put up a flag? Why can't you at least give us the dignity of having an American flag in here?" And other questions of that sort. And we always discussed very frankly what we felt our interests were; that is to say that if we were going to recognize the PRC as the legal government of China, certain things were corollary to that, and our interest was in making the most of the

substantive relationship with Taiwan and making sure that worked, and that's what we should concentrate our efforts toward. By and large, I think our friends in Taiwan also saw substance as the important thing. The relationship today is, I think, a very friendly one. But we've been very careful from the very beginning to adhere to the undertakings made to Beijing in the normalization agreement by the statements of President Carter about conducting our relations with the people of Taiwan on an unofficial basis.

Q: Harry, to get to the substance of this thing, in a way we're watching this peculiar relationship and we have made the statement that, "Oh, yes, there's one China, and eventually this will be settled." From somebody who's an outsider, I mean, it seems so apparent that Taiwan and mainland China have gone separate ways, separate systems, and eventually they're going to be two countries. I find it very difficult to see a melding, but this is from the outsider. Is the Chineseness of both sides such that they will coalesce? What was the feeling when you were there at that time? Where was this going to go?

THAYER: Well, there's no unanimity of feeling. As you know, there have been for decades people advocating an independent Taiwan. But the current arrangement and relationship to each other could continue, more or less, this way indefinitely for decades and decades without any substantive formal change in the relationship but simply a more relaxed intercourse between them. It's easy to see this current situation continuing indefinitely.

I think our interest is not in having it settled in any particular way, but in a peaceful solution, and that's been our interest since the 1950s, and that continues to be our interest today. We're not tied to a particular solution of the differences. We're just tied to a peaceful solution. We're not in the business of expediting that, and that wasn't my business when I was director of AIT, certainly. Our desire is to conduct a healthy relationship with both sides of the China equation and let them figure out how to sort out their own relationships.

Q: Speaking of when you were in Singapore, did you have any problem with congressional visits and other visits like that— of having particularly congressmen or congresswomen

coming in, sounding off on their own, particularly those who didn't like the relationship and getting headlines and all, and there you were, having to deal with that?

THAYER: We did have some. There are a lot of congressmen who were very friendly for a long time with the former Republic of China, now Taiwan, and who made their views clear, particularly when they were in Taiwan on visits. There were lots of “friends of the ROC”—people formerly from the Hill—who visited Taiwan when I was there, for a notable example, Senator [Barry] Goldwater, whose views haven't changed much on the issue. And these people are lionized. They are given plenty of attention in the press, and they say their thing and we say, or more likely don't say, our thing, since we keep a fairly low profile out there. That simply is understood to be part of the game. I never made any attempt to tell a senator or a representative what he should or shouldn't say. Sometimes we'd be asked for our view, and I would give it frankly. But for the most part, whatever was said, it didn't embarrass us because we, as contractors for the administration, were doing our people-to-people job and not attempting to tell the Congress what to do.

Q: You could do a certain amount of ducking, too, couldn't you? Because if you were an embassy, you'd have a USIS office that would be having to respond to everything that concerned America. But being where you were, you could kind of duck things that normally a full-blown embassy would have to respond to.

THAYER: I guess that's true. We did, however, consider it part of our job, being conscientious contractors to the United States Government, to have the government's viewpoint well known, and, therefore, our Cultural Information Service, which would be called USIS at another post, did issue reports about events in America, purveying the American government's viewpoint on given issues. There were certain things we didn't do in that respect. I can't remember what they were offhand, but we were very careful to continue to wear our non-governmental colors.

Q: Were there any major issues that you had to deal with in this time between the United States and Taiwan?

THAYER: The major issues we had that I can discuss here were in the trade area. Taiwan was targeted by the USTR, United States Trade Representative's office, for a number of negotiations—and Section 301 actions were threatened more than once. We had some very heated times with the authorities in Taiwan over trade matters, and some of them got to be quite unpleasant. The most unpleasant was, for me, the American effort to get Taiwan to open its market to American cigarettes. Taiwan wasn't the only place where we've done that. This was an issue in Korea, too, and also elsewhere, Thailand and so forth. Because of a combination of circumstances, the tone of this debate on cigarettes got to be quite nasty and made me extremely uncomfortable. The press was very hard on us. We brought a lot of pressure. This pressure on Taiwan provoked statements by the Taiwan tobacco people and others that were unhelpful. The trade issue thus became a big political issue, with overtones of pushing opium on the Chinese—this kind of thing.

Q: This goes back to the 1840s.

THAYER: That's right.

Q: The opium wars in China.

THAYER: So it was really quite nasty. It was bad enough so that I took the initiative to have meetings with the major publishers and/or editorial boards of some of the newspapers in Taiwan, the key ones, in which I and the economic counselors and others involved in these tobacco negotiations sought to make sure they understood where we were coming from and so that we would reduce the acrimonious press treatment of this tobacco issue, which was souring the atmosphere on other issues.

Let me say that the fact is that Taiwan has a tobacco monopoly bureau and Taiwan makes its own cigarettes, and a good deal of revenue was earned by this. Their market

was closed, relatively speaking, to American cigarettes, closed to American cigarette advertising, but open to Taiwan advertising. There's no question about where the equities were. Taiwan being an otherwise very mature player in international trade—and a very effective player—was, for various reasons we're familiar with (a lot of them domestic reasons)—not opening up its cigarette market, and we wanted it open. Of course, the American tobacco companies wanted it open.

We handled it in a way that was not the best. USTR had the responsibility, but we at AIT failed to anticipate what should have been obvious: If we didn't orchestrate carefully, the "P.R." could be harmful. We—I—failed to caution USTR adequately, and that was our job. One set of negotiations I remember in particular was held in Taiwan for a week or so. The way we allowed our presence to be characterized was faulty. We had a whole bunch of American negotiators in a downtown hotel. The press—the local press, which can be very aggressive on such things—had very easy access to the Americans. And so we had the papers just flooded with reports about what the Americans were doing and how many there were and all of them bringing this huge pressure on poor innocent Taiwan, Americans pushing poison, cancer-inducing substances, on the people of Taiwan. It was a very, very unpleasant business.

I, myself, continue to have deep misgivings about this aspect of our trade policy, that is, the tobacco aspect. It's not a new idea, but it made me damn uncomfortable to see us bringing such government resources to bear to ensure that we were able to sell to other countries what is in fact our cancer- inducing product.

If AIT simply had warned of the potential problems, we could have avoided much of them, perhaps, by insisting the negotiations not be conducted in Taiwan, but rather in the U.S. or even elsewhere.

Q: To put this into context, in today's Washington Post, February the first, the Center for Disease Control announced that approximately a half a million Americans died last

year because of tobacco-related diseases. This has been well known for at least the last decade or so.

THAYER: Yes. And one can do one's professional thing by treating the trade as a matter of principle. This trade issue, like intellectual property rights, or anything else, is a matter of principle. But there is this human side, and as a Foreign Service professional, I did my professional thing. But I continue to have real doubts about where my moral obligations lie in such a situation.

Q: In all the communications and the people you talked to, was there an unease in both the communications from Washington and the people about this? Nobody today can pretend that this is not an extremely addictive, extremely dangerous form of indulgence.

THAYER: No, I think that the people involved in these kinds of negotiations (it's natural) it's natural, have long since gone past the dilemmas that some people have the time for. These people—and we—had their job to do. It was to open up the world trading system. Tobacco was one obvious place where it wasn't opened, and it should be treated like everything else. I never detected much misgivings on the part of the people involved in these negotiations, including those in my own staff, because the Taiwan restrictions did not give, as we say, a level playing field. And for the high moral postures of the Taiwan press on this matter, the fact is that the Taiwan monopoly was pushing their cigarettes as hard as they could. So a lot of this was, of course, hypocritical posturing on the part of our Taiwan interlocutors.

Nevertheless, as a personal matter, I felt—and I still feel—deep regret that I was involved in this. This is not to exaggerate my role. These trade things go on. Chiefs of missions do their modest thing, but they're not very important to it. Although I did make a number of representations on this subject and tried very hard to explain the American position. I did this publicly and privately, as I did on many economic matters. But still, tobacco was special, and I didn't like it.

Q: Did anything come out of this while you were there?

THAYER: I'm not quite sure where we stand now. There has been a lot of progress, I believe, on the tobacco front and on a lot of fronts for that matter. I think we now have reached a higher level of understanding with Taiwan on a range of issues that are in USTR's purview. I think the relationship is going quite well.

Q: Any other major issues that you had to deal with when you were there?

THAYER: Another very unpleasant issue was the murder of Henry Liu, who was a Chinese-American resident in California. The responsibility for this murder lay with one of the intelligence branches of the Taiwan government.

Q: Where was he murdered?

THAYER: He was murdered in California. There were a lot of discussions between us and our friends in Taiwan, a lot of American outrage about the murders. It eventually surfaced that these were connected to officially connected people, and three of them were, in fact, convicted in Taiwan court and jailed. They have, I believe, recently been released, having served a number of years. But that was a very unpleasant episode in relations between us and Taiwan. In many ways it cast a pall over a lot of the other things that were going on during my time.

Q: What was your reading of something like this? Nothing could hurt relations more than to do this type of thing, and here you have the Taiwan government, which is a very knowledgeable government and understands the United States. Was this sort of a rogue elephant operation or what?

THAYER: The responsibility was at a fairly high level in the intelligence branch, and the key guy, as far as we know, was convicted; and justice, as far as we know, was done. So in the end, it was an issue that was taken care of, but it went on for a while, and it was a

difficult one, because it was murder on American soil and obviously something that the Americans had to take very seriously. But, ultimately, the Chinese courts handled the thing appropriately, and, as I say, justice seemed to have been done. But we had to express our outrage—forcefully and at high levels—before action was taken.

Q: So you feel it was caught at the appropriate level. This was not a scapegoat thrown to protect a major government policy?

THAYER: I don't think there's anything more that I can say about it. As far as I know, justice was done. We wanted to see it done as fast as possible and have our concerns respected.

Q: You left Taiwan in '86?

THAYER: I left Taiwan in '86.

Q: Then you were the dean of the language school at the Foreign Service Institute.

THAYER: Right. I had decided that after Taiwan I wanted to come back home, and I was very much interested in the whole training operation. We still have a Chinese language training school in Taiwan, very important to the State Department and other agencies concerned with a China specialty. But I have an interest in the training in general, the development of the professional cadre. So I sought this job, if it came open. I asked to have it after Taiwan, and it came open at just the right time. So I served as dean of the language school, and I saw that as kind of a transition to my retirement which I saw coming up in the next few years.

Q: Looking at the language training, what would you say were the strengths and weaknesses of the Foreign Service Institute's approach to it?

THAYER: There are many strengths, and one of them is we pioneered in training adults how to speak foreign languages. Some of it was done during the Second World War at

Yale and other places, Cornell, I guess. But we began to do it in the State Department in a fairly well-budgeted way and developed our own texts and our own teaching methods and our own testing methods. We did so very effectively, although we still have our critics..

In the language school we have a score or more of MA and Ph.D.-level scientific linguists who are the core of our training effort, who I found to be intellectually very high class. These are the people who run the language programs. These were a very creative and devoted and professional group in whose presence I found myself enormously stimulated. I had a lot of fun with these people, learning what they were doing, helping get the money to help them do it better. My job, in part, also was to be sure that what these professional language trainers were doing was conforming with the very special needs of the Foreign Service. Under these linguists, we have all native speakers actually teaching our students, as you know.

The weakness of the Foreign Service language program, I believe, as do many others, is that we focus on training a mass of people, but we don't have enough money to train many of them deeply. That is to say we train people to a 3-2 level, but don't train enough to a 4-4 level.

Q: 3-3 being speaking and reading on a rating of 5 as highest.

THAYER: Right. A level of so-called professional fluency, reading and speaking. But, in fact, it would be better if we had the money to train more people to a higher level. In fact, we are putting a little bit more money in training to a higher level, and we are doing other things. We were, before I got there and we still are after I left, doing things to train certain people to a higher level than the standard 3-3. But the effort to train a mass of people well involves also constantly developing new materials, up-to-date materials. Languages evolve like anything else, and unless you have money to do that, you can't do it. Unless you have money to be able to pay for the man hours involved, you can't train your teaching cadre adequately or develop adequate new materials.

The language training operation, when I was there, was vastly underfunded. It still is underfunded, and it's a great shame that more money cannot be put into the language training operation. I think we do very well with what we've got, but it could be a lot better.

Q: Did you find that universities more or less fed off of the Foreign Service operation and language training?

THAYER: Well, there are not many universities that train in the spoken language the way we do. Georgetown, Middlebury, Monterey Institute—not the Army, but the private institute—Cornell, there are institutions which do train in the spoken. But we train for particular purposes and for very directly practical purposes and are unique in the mass of training that we do, as well as the number of languages that we do. We do forty-plus languages. So we're able to attract to the Ph.D. linguist level, very high-class people from the universities. And the Ph.D.s who came to us are interested in the challenge and the rewards of training people—adults—to go right to work in a language. The process of developing textual material and teaching methods in an atmosphere that encourages creativity, to develop systems to produce people who can go into a foreign country and use the language, that is a very rewarding thing for many people who are professional linguists, and that was very important to us.

Middlebury, for example, has an extremely good program, and they have a total immersion program that I visited, their summer program. It is very good. In some respects, universities have questions about what the Foreign Service Institute does, and in some respects they are all praise for what we do. So it's a mixed bag, but my impression is generally that the prestige of the Foreign Service Institute language operation is really very high.

Q: You retired in 1989?

THAYER: I retired in 1989.

Q: Looking back on it, what do you feel about your career in the Foreign Service?

THAYER: I'm very happy with my career. I left the newspaper work, came into the Foreign Service, in part, because I wanted to have a piece of history, play a part in history, as I conceived it at the time, with a particular interest in Chinese affairs; and I have been able to do that. Obviously, one plays a very modest role in history, but one is at least a part of things that are worth being a part of, and for that reason, it was very satisfactory.

Q: Harry, I want to thank you very much.

End of interview